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BY

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

JAMES THORNTON, an archaeologist, of Lallington, Yorkshire, had died leaving a few thousand pounds in safe investments and, to the surprise of his family, a collection of precious stones of unknown value. Tamar Scott, of Dean Street, Soho, dealer in precious stones and antique jewellery, known to her friends and clients generally as T. Scott, was deputed by Christopher Bramfield, a diamond merchant of Hatton Garden and a Licensed Valuer, to value the collection. She arrived for this purpose at Lallington Station on an afternoon in late October in the year 1914.

She learnt to her disgust that she would have to mount a long and steep hill to get to the village, and that even then she would not have reached the Thorntons' house, which stood at the extreme top, near a little spinney at the end of the village, and almost on the edge of the moor. Tamar Scott had always hated hills, and considered that they were spiteful manifestations of Nature. When she heard that the little yellow omnibus would probably come down to meet the next train, she elected to wait, and strolled into the railway hotel, where an exceedingly pleasant landlady received her and installed her in the ingle-nook of the comfortable hall. She was waited on by one of the young daughters of the house, whose gay friendliness prevented her from being cross at the delay.

"Marton Grange is a fine old house," the girl said, as she brought the tea, together with some tempting-looking cakes. "It has a beautiful oak staircase and a ghost, a monk who comes and looks in at the library window."

"Indeed," said Tamar Scott. "Have you ever seen him?"

"No," she answered, "but our funny old man, Tim, who does the coals and boots here, has seen him once. And he said that his hair stood on end and never came down for three whole days. I think mine wouldn't come down for three whole years!"

Tamar laughed.

"Oh, it's splendid up there, you know," the girl continued. "I often wish we lived on the moor. There's such a view and such a wind. I do love the wind. Still, I make nothing of dashing up there when I've time. No time now, since Father joined up, and all the men too. Father is in India just at present. We heard from him yesterday."

"Did you?" said T. Scott, with some attempt at human interest. It was a matter of entire indifference to her whether Father were in India or torpedoed and at the bottom of the sea, but the young girl's bright manner and winning trustfulness made a very definite claim on a kindly response.

So she added, somewhat to her own surprise:

"You must be very thankful that so far he's safe."

"Rather," the girl said, her face lighting up. "Father's top-hole. I don't know whatever we should do if we lost him. Well, I must be off. I've got to see after the cows. One of them, a perfectly darling little Alderney, is so obstinate, she will never come in for any

one but me. If you want anything, please ring, and Mother will look after you. If you do change your mind and don't wait for the yellow omnibus, you can't mistake the way. You turn to the right, cross the bridge, have a look at the river, and then begin to climb. When you get to the blacksmith's, rest a bit. That's what Mother always does. I make her."

Tamar Scott gave a friendly little nod as the girl darted away with a song on her lips. Something in the child's youthfulness and energy refreshed and stimulated her. She began to feel that she could mount that hateful hill after all.

"That's a brisk little girl of yours," she remarked, when Mrs. Passmore appeared on the scene again.

The mother smiled with the pride of love.

"You'd never believe how sensible and practical she is," she said. "And yet a real child at the same time. We could not run this house without her. It is her great ambition to show her father when he returns from the war, that we have taken every care of the business."

Then, after she had received payment for the tea and arranged to reserve a bedroom for Tamar Scott for the night, she said:

"You are going to visit Marton Grange, I hear?"

Tamar nodded rather rigidly.

"There's a curious story going about the village that Mr. Thornton has left a valuable jewel collection, hidden in secret places," Mrs. Passmore continued. "But perhaps it is only gossip. He was a queer gentleman, though, and only interested in ancient things. But as for jewels, I can't help thinking that pretty little Miss Marion, her father's favourite, would have coaxed some

of them out of him soon enough, if there had been any. I never saw so much as one little seed-pearl on her — never once. No, I think it's just gossip and nothing more."

"Perhaps it is," said Tamar glacially, for she invariably kept her own counsel, and no human being had ever succeeded by any artifice, subtle or shallow, in worming out from her the reason of her arrival on a scene, or the nature of her business when once there.

But Mrs. Passmore's remarks gave her food for reflection. She had received a vague hint from Christopher Bramfield that Mr. Thornton's collection of precious stones was probably valuable, but certainly there had been no suggestion of secrecy. It was the idea of secrecy which arrested her. If, in addition to having collected them, he had really maintained an entire silence about them broken only by death, then he had evidently been an enthusiast of enthusiasts, a slave, held fast, enchained by a passion of adoration which no one and nothing could ever have undermined. She could understand both his passion and his secrecy, for she had inherited from her mother a passionate love for precious stones, and more than a touch of secret rapture.

The circumstances, therefore, became doubly alluring. She decided not to wait for that yellow omnibus, but to speed on her way, hill or no hill.

Before she started off she asked for a brush, and very carefully brushed her soft, dark, chestnut-brown coat and skirt, which, together with a round toque to match, was her invariable out-door dress. She was particular about her appearance and exceedingly careful of her clothes, chiefly for economy's sake, though,

being rich, she could have had as many as she chose. In her shop she wore always a saxe-blue overall, the exact colour of her silk waist. Jewels she never wore. It was enough for her to know that her safe was full of them.

She was a woman of about forty-two years of age, of middle stature, not slight, not solid, dignified in bearing, quiet, yet giving the impression of one having a fund of fierceness in reserve, either for attack or repulse. She was a Jewess, but not of pronounced type, with dark hair and black eyes, and with a mouth fine and sensitive but undoubtedly sullen. She was sullen, too, sullen and sulky and uncommonly rude at times. Long ago a man had said of her:

"*T. Scott reserves all her manners for minerals only. No one else need apply.*"

But that was ten years before this record opens. She had changed since then, grown less sulky, had more kind impulses, and was certainly not so continuously rude. And as she became kinder, her face, always strangely interesting, took on a new expression which at moments lent it an unspeakable beauty.

Even her sulkiness, too, had a charm all its own, and the few who knew her well — for she had always ploughed a lonely furrow — had forgiven her everything and loved her in spite of her selfishness, her rudeness, the hard bargains she drove, and all her grasping ways. She could charm strangers, too, when she wished, and no one was her equal in repelling them either. Young people she did not try to repel. Very few came her way, but when they did put in an appearance some chord in her was touched to tenderness. Perhaps it was that she had always longed for young

companionship, as so many lonely children have longed, and when she was brought face to face with youthfulness the old yearning was translated into a graciousness of spirit which showed her at her best.

As she went along, the pure, bracing air caught her in its embrace and stimulated her to unwonted elasticity of step. She glanced heavenwards and was arrested by the beauty of the clouds, grey, pink, dove-coloured, fringed with gold and red. At the bridge she paused to watch the river Wharfe, swollen with recent rains, and to feel the life-giving chill of its breath strike full on her face. She crossed to the other side, and with her eye followed its course until it hid itself from view. She waited until a drove of sheep with an old shepherd had passed her and a long, thin line of cows with an escort in the shape of a tiny boy, and then she left the bridge behind and began to climb to the village.

The hill was not so bad after all. She thought she had made rather a fuss about nothing. And one could always stop and look back at that shining river and those emerald fields through which it threaded its way. Tamar Scott was not fond of Nature, and seldom deigned to notice it; but it was borne in on her that here were beautiful scenes which would not allow themselves to be ignored.

Suddenly she heard the sound of a horse and cart, and turning, saw a dog-cart and a cob brought to a precipitate halt by the driver, a girl of about nineteen, who called out in a most friendly voice:

"Is that Miss Scott? Oh, do say it is! I meant to have met the train, but Tom didn't bring the horse back from Henwick in time."

"Yes, I'm Miss Scott," Tamar answered, with one

of her half-sulky smiles which had so much charm in them.

"Then do please get in, and I'll run you up to the Grange in less than no time," the girl said. "I'm Marion Thornton. Sha'n't I just give Tom a wigging for making me late! Steady, Robin; don't pretend you mind being stopped in the middle of a hill. Are you all right, Miss Scott? Hold fast whilst we swirl round. Oh, nothing will happen. Nothing ever does happen with Robin and me. We scamper up and we scamper down, and if we were an aeroplane we'd loop the loop!"

Tamar did not feel at all sure that nothing would happen, even though Robin was evidently accustomed to precipitancy, and in perfect harmony with his dashing young mistress. She was not sorry when she was landed safely outside Marton Grange, or rather outside the spinney which led to it. Here steed and driver left her and tore off in another direction at headlong pace. Tamar, recovering her breath and her senses, found that she was at the top of the little mountain village, with its quaint stone houses with mullioned windows and narrow cobbled streets, and the moors, stretching far and wide, rolling over each other in stately billows, not as mountains shutting out the space, but as the ocean promising it, offering it, bestowing it without stint or measure.

She stood for a few moments surveying the wonderful expanse, and then glanced at another old shepherd, resting in the tiny square, surrounded by his flock and watched over by his dog, quiet and serene in outward behaviour, but with eyes and brain ready for any emergency. Children were playing round the old pump. A herd of cattle was passing down from the moors. She

thought with a smile of the contrast between this peaceful scene and Dean Street, Soho. Then she opened the gate, went through the spinney and the garden, and found herself in front of a rather long, one-storied house, with an antique porch and old mullioned windows. It had evidently been added to from time to time, but presented no discords of line or form. A large yew tree on the left-hand side gave perhaps a sombre impression at first sight; but there was nothing depressing about the house itself, and although it stood alone, almost on the edge of the moor, its position did not suggest loneliness or dreariness, but rather a peaceful and comfortable isolation within a convenient stone's throw of the village. It was supposed originally to have been a monk's rest-house belonging to an abbey.

It looked like a place of rest now. A fire in one of the rooms cast a radiance on the window which served as a signal of kindly welcome. Tamar pulled at the long bell and was delighted when the door was opened, not by a servant, but by Marion herself.

"I shouldn't have left you outside the spinney," she said, "but that our old man was just going off, and I wanted him to put the horse and cart away. I just caught him. Please come in here, will you? I think my brother Rupert is already here waiting for you, and I'll call Mother and the others."

She led Tamar into the room where the fire-fairies were dancing in joyous measure.

"Rupert," she said, "here's Miss Scott. I met her half-way after all."

A young man rose none too nimbly from the arm-chair and held out his hand to Tamar.

"How good of you to come at once, Miss Scott," he

said, with a charming little courteous smile. "We are all frightfully anxious to know about the jewels. I've been counting the hours since Mr. Bramfield wrote that you were the expert who was coming — counting the hours and reading your splendid book on precious stones which he sent us as an introduction. I didn't know there was such a thing as an 'asteria,' but now I could pass an examination on the subject!"

T. Scott's face flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, Bramfield sent that, did he?" she said.

"It's a ripping work," he added. "I tell you it has made me forget about this wretched war."

"I am glad," Tamar said, and she glanced at him, saw the signs of suffering on his thin face, noted that his left arm was stiff and his left leg slightly disabled, and knew that he had done his part at the front.

"Mr. Bramfield says there is nothing on earth that you don't know about precious stones," he said. "And I can quite believe it after reading some of those chapters. How on earth do you know about it all — the romance and the lore and all that, as well as the mineralogical part? And you evidently care frightfully — don't you? That's what carries one along."

"Yes, I care frightfully," Tamar repeated, with a quiet smile.

"Look here," he said, "you must have some tea, and I just wanted to say something to you before my mother and the others come in. We arranged between us that I should be the one to explain the situation to you alone. That's why Marion has bolted."

"Don't ring for tea," she said. "I had some at the hotel."

"All right, then," he said. "I'll fire away. First,

I must tell you that my mother is rather upset. I'm afraid she'll weep a lot — and all that sort of thing. You won't mind, will you?"

"No, I won't mind in the least," T. Scott answered. "Tears make no impression on me."

"Rather boring, aren't they?" Rupert said. "But in this case there is a good deal of rather painful cause for tears and wounded feelings, and we're all a bit jarred, you know. You see, we'd no idea whatsoever that my father owned this collection which you are going to value. Not the slightest suspicion."

"Ah," thought Tamar, "then it is a secret collection, after all."

"So I wanted to warn you that the atmosphere is likely to be — well, perhaps a bit trying," Rupert Thornton said.

Tamar nodded, to show that she understood.

"The circumstances have been rather peculiar," he went on, with a slight laugh which had a touch of deprecation in it. "My father kept his precious stones in boxes constructed to look like the volumes of a stuffy old encyclopaedia which were lodged on the top shelves of his book-case. Wasn't that queer of him?"

Tamar remained silent. She was deeply interested.

"He knew it was a perfectly safe hiding-place," Rupert added. "He knew that no human being in this house would ever have wanted to be bothering after that top shelf and any of those encyclopaedia volumes, which had been there for years. He counted on that — and he scored. My mother has taken his secrecy very much to heart."

"And have you also taken it to heart?" Tamar asked.

"Oh, well, as I told you, we're all a bit jarred," he answered. "We evidently knew nothing about him. He was a very reserved man, and none of us were very intimate with him. We were scarcely ever allowed in his library which he kept locked. He was a learned archaeologist, and we thought he wasn't interested in anything except mounds and barrows and stone implements and spear heads, etc. But I think he must have had a jolly good sort of 'off time' in collecting these stones and hiding them away from us all. Every one has got to have some sort of a secret spree. I'm glad he had his private innings. That's how I look on it with one part of my brain — and with the other part I'd like to understand his motives. I . . ."

He broke off suddenly, waved his hand as if in dismissal of the subject, and said cheerfully:

"Well, I mustn't worry you with all this. I'll go and call my people and bring the jewels. We're very excited about their value. There is no saying we're not — secrecy or no secrecy!"

He disappeared from the room, leaving T. Scott in a state of beatific curiosity to learn more. The story appealed both to her sympathy and to her imagination. She pictured to herself that lover of jewels, a stranger to her, and yet of kindred nature, revelling secretly in his secret treasures, adding to them one by one, perhaps standing sometimes and gazing with silent rapture and satisfaction at those innocent-looking "stuffy" volumes which, in the presence of others, were only discarded books of no value or interest, but which, in private intercourse with himself, were sacred shrines of silent worship.

Held by these thoughts and by the picture she had

conjured up, she scarcely noticed that the door had opened, and that the family were trooping into the room. Rupert Thornton's voice roused her, when he said:

"This is Miss Scott, Mother."

Tamar looked up and saw an elderly lady, and Marion, also another girl, probably the elder daughter, and another son, younger than Rupert, about eighteen years of age, and very like Marion.

Tom, at least, was not weighed down by tragic memories. He was in the best of spirits, and was carrying with elaborate and exaggerated care, savouring of mischief, three volumes of the encyclopaedia, which with a grimace he suddenly dumped down on the table.

"My mother, my sisters, and my brother," Rupert said, in his courteous way.

T. Scott nodded to Marion, as if to an old acquaintance, and bowed gravely to Mrs. Thornton and the others. Mrs. Thornton had already produced her handkerchief and was preparing to weep.

"Mother dear, I do beg of you to control yourself for your own sake. It is so bad for you to give way," her elder daughter said disapprovingly.

"Oh, shut up, Winifred," Tom said in a loud whisper. "Leave the Mater alone. We aren't all as self-contained as you, thank goodness."

For a moment Tamar felt a little embarrassed, as she was not accustomed to the sallies of brothers and sisters; but she soon recovered herself, and fixed her eyes on those three dummy books which her fingers were itching to handle.

"Do you wish me to look at the jewels now?" she asked very kindly and respectfully of Mrs. Thornton,

who was still immersed in her handkerchief. "Or would you rather wait?"

"No, we'll begin now," Mrs. Thornton answered, in a grief-stricken voice.

"Cheer up, Mother dear," Marion said affectionately. "Think how jolly it will be if Miss Scott tells us that the jewels are worth a big fortune!"

"Yes, that's the way to look at it, Mater," Rupert said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"It is such an ordeal," murmured Mrs. Thornton.

"It would be a far worse ordeal for us if they didn't exist at all," remarked Winifred severely.

"Suppose, for instance, they were worth ten thousand pounds," Rupert suggested gaily.

"Far more likely ten thousand pence, old chap," Tom rejoined. "All the stories I've ever read in the past about hidden treasure left me icy cold with disappointment. I've begun to freeze already. In fact, I'm below zero."

He shivered as he spoke and doubled himself up and made his teeth chatter. Tamar laughed. She liked Tom. She was thankful he was there to help the situation.

"If I were you, I shouldn't begin to freeze until you know for certain that the hidden treasure has proved to be a disappointment," she said. "I've known hidden treasure that was not."

"All right," he laughed. "I'll thaw. Here goes. I have thawed."

"Don't be so frivolous, Tom," Marion said. "Do behave. You'll hurt Mother's feelings."

"Nothing could hurt my feelings more than they have been hurt," Mrs. Thornton murmured from be-

neath her cambric handkerchief. "The secrecy has broken my heart."

There was a pause. Some words of exhortation rose to Winifred's lips, but at a stony glance from Tom she repressed them, and contented herself instead with a low sigh expressive of infinite boredom and resigned hopelessness. Tom whistled *sotto voce*, Marion glanced at the mirror opposite and arranged her hair, and Rupert seemed lost in thought. He was thinking that he was glad he had prepared the jewel expert for the possibilities of a trying family scene. He wondered whether his mother was really as much hurt by his father's secrecy as she supposed herself to be. Wasn't it just a sort of unconscious pose, the results of the survival of that traditional absurdity which claimed that husbands and wives should share the same thoughts, the same outlook and be permanently deprived of any separate or secret expression of individuality? The claim had never justified itself, of course, and never could justify itself. Yet it still persisted and served, as in the case of his mother, as a basis for false sentimentality and for indulgence in the luxury of injured pride. Well, he mustn't let that relationship develop between his girl Dorothy and himself. It wasn't good enough. She must be free, and he must be free.

And then he smiled. He could not imagine Dorothy being anything else except free and "on her own," whether he liked it or not. As for his father's secrecy, it certainly had been a tremendous surprise to them all. But ought they to have been so surprised? His father had always been a strange sort of parent, very detached from them all, undoubtedly very detached

from him. He had always admired him and had wanted to be closer to him, but that had been impossible. Marion appeared to have got the nearest — and that was not very near, as events proved. He had kept his secret to the end. But, really, his money had been his own to do what he liked with, and he might very well have reasoned with himself that he was combining the secret gratification of a passion with the duty of saving for his family. Rupert rather wished his mother could see it in this light. Perhaps she would, after a time — see it impersonally — and then suffer less.

It was T. Scott who broke the silence. She could bear the tension no longer, and she had arrived at such a pitch of excitement about the contents of those boxes, that she nearly snatched at them.

"Well, what about the jewels?" she said in her most business-like tone of voice, such as she used at her counter in her shop in Dean Street.

Her reminder recalled the family, and they were soon all seated at the table, with Tamar in the midst of them and the precious stones spread out before her enraptured eyes. Discreet though she was, she could not suppress an exclamation of delight.

"I'm inclined to think you have a small fortune here," she said half to herself.

"Hurrah," said Tom cheerfully. "Anything in the neighbourhood of ten thousand pounds? That'll do me nicely."

"Hush, Tom, don't be a beast," Marion said. "Do behave yourself."

"He must indeed have enjoyed collecting these gem stones," Tamar said almost in a whisper.

She handled them one by one, gloating over them, revelling in them, with no thought of their value dominant in her mind, but entirely taken up with the magic of their beauty. Rubies, amethysts, sapphires, emeralds, peridots, Oriental topazes vied with each other in lustre and loveliness; and an opal with entrancing flashes of flame-red and brilliant green held her spellbound. Suddenly she started and gave a cry of joy.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "my star ruby — my own star ruby which I always regretted having parted with. However, I got a still more beautiful one in its stead. But this is a very lovely specimen with its shimmering, six-pointed star."

She turned to Rupert.

"You were speaking of an asteria," she said. "This is the one I described in my book."

"How would you know it?" Winifred asked sceptically.

"How would I know?" Tamar repeated with a soft, caressing laugh. "As a shepherd knows his sheep, as an astronomer knows his stars."

"One for you, Winifred," Tom said, chuckling.

"It seems entirely unbelievable," Winifred remarked in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Probably," Tamar answered dreamily. "Yet I remember it well — and remember the client to whom I sold it — for fifteen hundred pounds."

"Fifteen hundred pounds!" they exclaimed in chorus.

Tamar nodded.

"I can see him now," she said. "A tall man, with deep-set eyes, lantern-jawed. I remember he stuttered slightly — very slightly."

"My poor husband," Mrs. Thornton said, relapsing into tears.

But no one noticed. Their whole interest was centred on the gems and on Tamar's comments. She called this one an alexandrite, that one a rose-pink beryl, another a true cat's-eye, another a parti-coloured green sapphire, another a South American emerald, another a brown diamond, another a Siam ruby; and exclamation followed on exclamation as, after scrutinizing each gem most carefully, she put a rough value on it which she said would have to be substantiated by proper tests and a more careful consideration of various characteristics and certain obvious imperfections. A few of the stones, she said, were not valuable in themselves; but most of them not only excited in her a warm admiration of their beauty, but also a lively commercial appreciation of their worth. She enjoyed herself hugely over the collection, and she enjoyed also the pleasure of giving reassuring verdicts to these young people grouped around her and waiting on her every word. And looking up once, she was amused and glad to see that Mrs. Thornton was no longer occupied with her tears and her cambric handkerchief, but was taking a natural and interested part in the proceedings. As for Tom, he was a source of great amusement to Tamar. He refused to be suppressed, and she laughed softly when he blurted out remarks which were considered out of taste by the family.

"By Jove," he said once, "but if it's true, as you say, that the Governor knew all about precious stones, why on earth did he want to go and buy any which were valueless? That beats me hollow."

Tamar smiled indulgently.

"He probably admired something in them," she said. "Some stones are exceedingly interesting from a collector's point of view, and yet comparatively valueless. I have some I wouldn't part with for any sum — and yet I could not tell you why."

"I do think he might have given me two or three of the valueless ones," Marion suddenly exclaimed. "He knew I loved pretty things."

"I think I can explain why he did not," Tamar said kindly. "He probably could not bring himself to break into his collection which, apart from value and interest, represented to him also many cherished memories — the joy of search, the delight in finding, the pleasure in possessing. It takes a lover of precious stones to understand that state of mind. To part with one specimen, however insignificant, would be like digging it out of one's very heart."

"Never mind, Marion, you'll be able to have as many of the rotten ones as you want now," Tom put in. "We'll make you a present of them all and keep the choicest for ourselves. Cheerioh."

"Would it not be more to the point if we asked Miss Scott the approximate value of the collection?" Winifred remarked in her most frigid tone of superiority.

"Roughly speaking, I should say about fifty thousand pounds," Tamar said, staring at Winifred with the same sort of concentrated interest which she was wont to bestow on a puzzling variety. "I may be a thousand or two out, either one way or the other. But I should say from this hasty examination about fifty thousand pounds."

"Fifty thousand pounds!" they exclaimed together in joyful surprise.

"Well, I'm hanged," Tom said. "My faith is restored in hidden treasure."

"Dear Father has saved for us, after all," Mrs. Thornton murmured, beginning to weep again.

"Yes, that's the way to look at it," Rupert said, speaking for the first time. "Father invested his money in a way that pleased him and benefits us in the end."

"He must have had the most exquisite joy in collecting and possessing these beautiful stones," Tamar said. "That I can swear to, because I know what I should have felt myself."

"Can you explain the secrecy?" Winifred asked sententiously.

"Can you explain human nature?" Tamar asked in return.

"Ah, there you are," Tom said. "Of course she can't. And who wants fifty thousand pounds explained? The great point is, we've got 'em!"

Tamar helped Rupert to put the stones carefully back into the boxes, and then rose.

"I will come up to-morrow and examine them again," she said. "But before I go, I must tell you that an idea has occurred to me which is worth considering. I understand these stones were kept in these dummy encyclopaedia volumes at the top of the bookcase in Mr. Thornton's study. May I ask how you knew they were there?"

"There were directions in the will for finding them," Mrs. Thornton faltered.

"And when was the will dated?" Tamar asked brusquely.

"Five years ago," Winifred answered promptly.

"Don't you remember, Mother, we noticed it was drawn up on your silver-wedding day — and that was five years ago."

Mrs. Thornton nodded assent and retreated immediately to the shelter of the cambric handkerchief.

"I would like to see that book-shelf," Tamar said slowly. "It may be that we should find more stones concealed elsewhere in that same region. I notice that there are several interesting ones missing which no lover of precious stones would ever dream of omitting from his collection."

"Come on, now's the time," cried Tom. "Perhaps we're in for another thrilling discovery. Come on, girls; hurry up, Rupe. No time to be lost."

They trooped out after him, but when they had crossed the hall, he abandoned them and dashed back to his mother, who had remained on the sofa and who was leaning forward gazing into the fire. He knelt down and put his rough-haired head against her breast and kept turning it round in a circular caress.

"I don't mean half I say, do I, dear old Mater?" he said, half in a whisper. "Look here, don't you worry. The Dad loved you well enough in his funny way, you bet. Men often have shameful secrets — worse luck — but his wasn't shameful — awfully curious and quaint, but not shameful — see! There now, don't you fret. He meant it all for the best — probably wanted to hide them from me because he knew I was such a beastly rotter — and that I'd steal them or pawn them — see! And what about that secret of yours, Mater? You did tell me once that you'd had an early love whom you'd never forgotten and never could forget — do you remember telling me when I fished out that faded photo

in your old desk — well, perhaps that's been your sort of hidden sapphire or diamond or ruby — see! Buck up, old Mater. Cheerioh! It's awfully jolly having fifty thousand pounds, isn't it? Well, I'm off to see the second instalment."

Her hand, which had been fondling his hair, lay listless in her lap, and she shook her head once or twice as if in silent refusal of any comfort or consolation offered her. Memories of thirty years of married life rose up to mock her. Thirty years she had lived her life side by side with this man — and she had known nothing of him. He had been an utter stranger to her. Tens of thousands of pounds could never heal the wound to her sensitiveness, her pride.

CHAPTER II

THEY found no further treasure in the library. They mounted the steps and examined carefully every book on the shelves to make sure that it was in very truth what it seemed to be, a book, and not a secret receptacle for precious stones. Horace, Virgil, Tacitus, Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," "The Pilgrim's Progress," Shakespeare, Buckle's "History of Civilization," Ranke's "History of the Popes," and many others, came under their searching scrutiny, and emerged from the ordeal blameless but disappointing. Tom cried: "Ha — hurrah, I've discovered something!" when he unearthed a locked note-book which looked suspiciously thick, and certainly encouraged the possibility of disguise. But when they prised it open they saw that it was guileless and uninteresting, with blank pages stained by age and dust.

"It's no use," he said. "I suppose we've got all the plunder. And I think we ought to be jolly well satisfied."

The others agreed, but Tamar was not satisfied, and kept on saying to herself:

"Where are the spinels? There must be spinels. It isn't at all likely that there would not be spinels in his collection. Probably they are in another hiding-place, together with other stones."

But although obsessed by this thought, she tried to remind herself that the fact of there being no spinels

was really no concern of hers, and she returned to Mrs. Thornton to say good-bye. To her surprise, Mrs. Thornton asked her not to go back to the hotel, but to spend the night at Marton Grange.

"Please, please do," they all said, circling round her as if she were an old friend whom they could not suffer to depart.

Tamar was pleased in her queer way, for she had always yearned secretly for young companionship, and had not found, or else had not been able temperamentally to take the chances of coming into an intimate relationship with young people. So she allowed herself to be persuaded to remain at Marton Grange; and Winifred herself, with a hospitable concern which had nothing psychological in it, installed her in the oak bedroom overlooking the moor, whilst Marion and Tom tumbled down to the hotel to say she would not be coming, and to fetch her suit-case. Mrs. Thornton roused herself from her sad thoughts and produced from her linen cupboard the best and most unhealthily heavy counterpane she could find. Tamar was, in fact, made welcome, and she sat amongst them that evening as a friend rather than as a stranger, told them thrilling things about precious stones, and the many superstitions connected with them and some of her curious experiences with clients, and gave herself out in every way for their benefit, stimulated by the feeling that they regarded her coming as a godsend and her good news as a blessing.

Probably never before in her life had she been so kind, so human, so companionable; and she not only held their interest and attention, but acted as a balm to each of them and won their united gratitude by her interpre-

tation and championship of that husband and father who had hugged his secret to himself and had only had it wrested from him by that Greater Mystery than any earthly secret.

She could explain him because she could understand him. In glowing words, in dreamy phrases, in soft, crooning tones, she dwelt on the magic of precious stones, their enthralling power, their permeating influence, their haunting persistency. She told how you might be dominated by the passion for them, tormented by hunger and thirst of spirit for some special gem stone on which you had set your heart and riveted your eyes, and not be appeased until you had secured it and added it to your collection — yes, and revelled in the secret possession of it. She said this passion was in some sense detached, impersonal, a passion of rapturous enthusiasm not necessarily of greed, and not inspired by selfishness nor the desire to wound, to hurt, to slight, to deprive. In her own life, for instance, she could tell them that over and over again her own passion for precious stones had swept aside the most pressing claims of her other passion, business — good business.

"If you knew me," she said, "you would understand that if that was possible in my case, anything would be possible in any other case."

And turning to Marion, she said:

"Do you see, perhaps, why, even though loving you dearly and knowing you cared for pretty things, he could not bring himself to spare you so much as even a little seed pearl?"

"I think I see," she answered in a low voice.

"Of course she sees," Tom put in. "Any idiot would after what you've been telling us."

He had voiced their general feeling. Wonder, speculation, resentment, grief, soreness, bitterness would surge up again in their separate breasts, but T. Scott had rounded off some of the edge of the knife which had wounded them.

She had the satisfaction of knowing that very night that her championship of Mr. Thornton, her comrade in spirit, had not been in vain. For when she was in her room and was warming herself by the fire, there came a knock at the door. On opening it, she found Mrs. Thornton standing on the threshold.

"I came to see that you had everything you wanted," she said.

"Everything," Tamar assured her. "More than everything. I'm not accustomed to a lovely fire in my bedroom. Will you not be seated for a moment and warm your hands?"

"It is cold on the moor," Mrs. Thornton said, "and this is a specially cold room. I am glad that they've made up a good fire for you. No, I won't detain you now. I am sure you must be tired."

But still she lingered, and it was evident that she had something she wished to say, but that she could not make up her mind to give utterance to it. She was no longer tearful and tremulous with emotion, but, on the contrary, a serene and dignified presence, calm with a new-found hope and a larger vision. Tamar stared at her and wondered. At last she left the fireplace where she had been standing and passed to the door. There she paused.

"*Something lost recovered*," she murmured with a most wonderful spiritual expression on her countenance which Tamar never forgot. The door closed on her;

and Tamar, alone, paced up and down repeating her words.

About ten minutes later she was visited by Marion who made no excuse for disturbing her, and went through no preliminaries.

"I could not go to sleep tonight without telling you how you have helped me," she said simply. "I've loved Father dearly, and I couldn't bear to think how he had shut me out in the cold. You see, we've been so much together, he and I. He knew perfectly well that I adored jewellery and nice clothes and all that sort of thing. He used to tease me on the subject, but always took my part when Winifred was 'superior.' She hadn't the least inclination that way, but I had. And he knew. And you'd think he would have had the impulse once or twice to gratify me, when all the time he was keeping those wonderful jewels under our very noses — but hidden away safely. It upset me awfully — I've just felt he couldn't have loved me at all — that's the part which has really upset me — oh, I don't pretend that I shouldn't have adored the jewels in any case, but as gifts from him they would have been a thousand times more valuable, because, you see, he has meant so much to me — and I did believe I meant a little to him — and then suddenly all affection seemed turned into a mockery and a farce. That is what poor old Mother has felt. But now you've explained him — I think you're quite wonderful — you've made me understand. You've been awfully good to us — I wish you could hear what the boys are saying about you — and Mother — dear old Mother, and even Winifred. . . ."

At that moment Winifred herself arrived on the

scene, making as an excuse for her intrusion that she had come to fetch Marion, who must not be allowed to keep their visitor any longer from her rest.

"I am sure you must be tired out," she said. "Come along, Marion. I want to speak to you about something."

And she added, with some degree of nervousness and with far less superiority of manner:

"You've given us a remarkable lesson in psychology tonight, Miss Scott. It has been deeply interesting and helpful. Good-night."

Tamar, left alone at last, suddenly realized that she was thoroughly played out and exhausted. The early start from London in the morning, the long journey, the delight over the stones, the unusual interest attaching to the circumstances and the royal way in which she had spent herself during the evening for these people and given them of her best, had told on her nerves. She threw herself on the bed without undressing, and lay half asleep, half awake, with thoughts focussed on the surroundings in which she found herself. And always there rose before her a vision of Mr. Thornton bending over his treasures in that locked library, revelling in them, hiding them afresh and then gazing up to the bookcase and smiling perhaps, because he knew they were safe from prying eyes and the chance of suspicious search. Yes, yes, she understood him well. She could follow the workings of his mind. She could sympathize with his emotions of pride and joy when he contemplated his beautiful specimens chosen so wisely, so carefully, and with such expert knowledge. She could even surmise some of the struggles he must have inter-

mittently made to throw off the spell under which he was being held, and to rid himself of the bondage for the sake of those he loved. She could almost hear him whispering:

"Some day I shall tell them — show them — share with them. But not today."

And such stones. Almost a faultless judgment he appeared to have.

And where were the spinels?

The more she thought about the collection, the more convinced she became that there must be spinels somewhere, and that he would never have been content without even one or two varieties of these very interesting blood relations of the ruby, which she herself greatly admired for their diversity of beautiful colouring and particularly for the pale delicate shades unlike any other precious stones. It was inconceivable that he should not have acquired a few specimens, if not the "flame-red" spinel itself, with its burning coal effect, a very rare stone and greatly appreciated by connoisseurs. No, the spinels were somewhere, and perhaps other gems with them. But where? If not in any other dummy books, where, then?

At last, having worn out her brain with vague but persistent conjecture, she fell fast asleep, and dreamed about them.

She was searching for them in her own shop, taking now a ruby, now an opal, now an aquamarine out of her own safe, and believing each time that she had at length unearthed the missing spinels, and then laughing at her own stupidity as she recognized instead the familiar and dearly-prized objects of her own collection. Suddenly the scene and circumstance changed. She

found herself mounting laboriously a steep hill which led to a village on the edge of a moor. It was a dark night, and the wind blew strong and cold. She longed to be in the shelter of her shop in Dean Street, and wondered why she had taken this journey to the wilds of Yorkshire. The fee she would get was not worth the toil of the ascent nor the battling with the elements. She pressed on without a pause until she reached the blacksmith's forge, where some one in the dim past, aeons ago, had told her to rest and recover her breath before she attacked the remaining and still more fatiguing half of the climb. A tall man, with a thin face and with lantern jaws, suddenly came round the corner, and said to her with a slight stutter:

"I've been expecting you to come. I want to show you my spinels — especially my 'flame-red' spinel. You'll envy it, I know. It is a very beautiful one."

"Ah," she said, "I thought you'd have spinels somewhere."

"Of course," he said, "but I've changed my hiding-place."

And he laughed softly, and rubbed his hands with a sly glee, and she laughed softly too, in complete sympathy with her comrade in spirit whom she understood so well. Again the scene changed suddenly, and she was alone in a room which after a time she recognized as Mr. Thornton's library, where she and the Thornton children had previously searched in vain for the spinels which she was certain must be hidden away somewhere. She did not search now. Her eyes were riveted on an old Bible box in the corner, dated 1640, piled up with old books and papers yellow with age and apparently undisturbed by meddling, tidying hands — one of those

precious rubbish heaps, in fact, inviolate by reason of the hopeless task involved in reducing its chaos to an ordered perfection.

"Not there, surely?" she said. And, as if in reply, she heard the echo of a soft laugh. Then, with a thrill of excitement, she almost leapt towards the uncompromising stack, and was on the point of lifting off some of the top papers — when she awoke. Outside, the wind was raging as she had heard it in her dream, and she shivered and shuddered from cold and a nameless fear, and crept to the fire, which, though low in the grate, was still sending out a comforting warmth and a reassuring glow.

"A dream," she said, still half dazed. "Even in my dreams I cannot get those spinels out of my head. Perhaps if I have a good warm and go to bed properly, I shall forget about them and sleep in peace."

But no peace came, and no desire for rest. Her nerves were tingling with a strange excitement, and she became obsessed with the memory of her dream, recalled every detail of it, and even heard the echo of that soft laugh borne to her, now from this direction, now from that. It impelled her to take action, against her will, against her physical inclination; but she had no power to resist the imperiousness of its appeal, and she lit a candle, opened the door cautiously, and stood on the landing hesitating, half hoping to hear in the house some sound of life which would decide her to return to her own quarters. Finally she did return, but only to fetch some gloves. It struck her they were necessary for secrecy.

There was no sound except the raging of the wind and the ticking of the great clock in the hall. The

coast was clear for her to go downstairs and continue that search urged on her in the first instance by her own instinct, and now by some power outside her control. She went down the stairs quickly but with an entire noiselessness, and passed along the passage on the left which she remembered led to the library. The next moment she opened the door, closed it, and stood alone in Mr. Thornton's sanctum, where he had held his revels and fostered his secret aims and ambitions. With a trembling hand Tamar raised the candle, and saw in the corner the Bible box with its super-imposed burden of papers, documents and books. Instantly her nervousness, her reluctance, were dispelled as though by magic. She leapt to it exactly as she had leapt in her dream, and without a moment's hesitation began removing the piled-up barricade guarding the object of her search. In her excitement she almost tore some of the things down, so frantically eager was she to learn whether she had in very truth been prompted to the real place of concealment, or whether her dream had been merely a delusion, a senseless nothing, like so many of our dreams.

At last she reached the Bible box, but instead of opening it, she remained on her knees staring at it, fumbling with the unlocked clasp, fiercely anxious to raise the lid — and yet unwilling to risk a possible disappointment. Then she took courage and opened the Bible box. She found an old backgammon box inside, which she lifted out with trembling hands. She opened it, and gave a low cry when she saw that it contained precious stones of various kinds. She bore it to the writing-desk, where she had placed the candle, and proceeded to examine the stones.

Yes, there were the spinels, quite a number of them, and amongst them a perfect " flame-red " spinel, of rare beauty, and in addition several emeralds, mossy, but of lovely colour, an alexandrite cat's-eye, two cornflower blue sapphires, many opals, some fine aquamarines, a few red tourmalines of remarkable transparency, two or three very choice specimens of turquoise, several " fancy " sapphires, a star sapphire, a rose-pink beryl, many other stones of varying interest or value, and last, but not least, four perfectly round pearls of unrivalled lustre, and without blemish.

As soon as she discovered these pearls, she desired them fiercely. She yearned to possess them, both for their beauty and their worth. Her passion was aroused, her avarice was excited by them. She asked herself why should she not have them, why should she not take them. No one would know. There they were, given into her hands. Not a soul in the world would be the wiser if she took them. Were they not, in fact, almost her right, since she had unearthed them? The people upstairs would never miss what they had not seen or known, and as for robbing them, well, had they not already come unexpectedly into a respectable fortune big enough to content any family, who, from what she could learn, had feared they had to face, if not poverty, at least very small means?

" They are so beautiful," she kept on whispering. " I want them. I don't want the other things. I won't touch the other things. But I want the pearls. I must have them. No one will know."

She passed through an agony of sore temptation, pocketed them once, restored them, reclaimed them,

stood possessed of them, tense but triumphant — and then shook her head, slowly and sorrowfully.

"No," she said. "No."

She replaced them with a deep sigh and, as if afraid of further temptation, closed the box hurriedly, put it back into the Bible box, and built up the stack of books and papers with feverish haste but clear remembrance of detail. She glanced at it critically, to make sure that it retained its appearance of undisturbed neglect, snatched up the candle, fled from the library and gained her room in safety.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Tamar awoke that morning, she remembered instantly her dream, the events of the night, her temptation and her resistance. She was happy that she had not yielded to the amazing opportunity of securing secretly those beautiful and valuable pearls, although she would not have been human not to regret the loss of them as possessions and also as commercial possibilities. But it was a distinct relief to know that her honour was intact, at least on this occasion, and that she had not failed in fidelity to Mrs. Thornton and those young people who had welcomed her so kindly, nor turned traitor to the man whom she had been championing and interpreting with an understanding inspired by a kindred enthusiasm. She said that she would have been doubly ashamed of herself if she had used to her own advantage the revelation vouchsafed to her in her dream. For in some mysterious way he had communed with her, shown his trust in her, guided her; and disloyalty to him would have been an infinitely worse sin than to any member of his family, since he was powerless to punish her and avenge himself. Yet, on reflection, she would have hated, too, to rob Tom, Rupert, Marion, even Winifred, and above all their mother, to whom, by her help — Tamar's help —" something lost had been restored," something more precious than rubies — an ultimate belief in love.

" As for the temptation," Tamar said aloud, as if in answer to an accuser, " don't read me any moral lecture

on that subject. Most of us would like to steal if we had a good and a safe chance. We may not own to the impulse, perhaps. And often we do not succumb to it. But it is there."

And she added, with a sigh of profound regret:

"Ah, those four pearls took a lot of resisting — such a colour, such a skin, such a lustre!"

She told the family nothing about her dream nor her discovery; but after she had gone carefully through the collection again, applied various tests and modified or verified her verdicts of the previous night, she urged on them the duty and the necessity of making a thorough search in every corner of the library. In fact she insisted on it, for the purposes of the valuation.

"I am still convinced that there must be more stones somewhere," she said to the young people. "I shall be very surprised if you do not find spinels. It seems incredible that Mr. Thornton should not have had a flame-red spinel. If I were you, I would open every drawer, every box, every parcel of papers — everything, in fact, especially that which would not seem to promise or suggest secrecy. For there is no denying the fact that your father was — peculiar."

"Cheerioh," Tom said with a merry wink. "Mad, I should think."

"Oh, Tom, don't," Winifred interposed severely.

"Hang it, can't we say what we all think, now that Mother isn't here?" he returned. "Of course he was sort of mad. An awfully jolly madness, I admit. I wonder whether we've all inherited it, and are all hiding valuable treasures in out-of-the-way places. I believe Winifred is. I think I'd better go and look in her

sponge-bag. Rupert, old chap, do you happen to have anything tucked away snugly amongst your fishing tackle? "

"Well," Marion said, "I vote we don't say anything to Mother unless we find something. She seems so much happier today. It would be a pity to upset her."

"Yes, we must leave the Mater out of it for the moment," Rupert said. "But of course Miss Scott is right to insist. We ought to turn everything inside out."

"Come on, I'm ready," Tom said. "You'll help too, won't you, Miss Scott? "

But Tamar shook her head and rose from the table.

"No," she answered brusquely. "That's your affair, not mine. As I am here, I don't mind waiting for two or three hours more whilst you make the search, and I'll go on the moor. But . . ."

She hesitated a moment, and then suddenly her commercial instincts got the better of her friendliness, and she added:

"But my time is valuable. I shall expect my fee to be increased by reason of the unusual circumstances."

They glanced at her in astonishment. She had shown them up to this moment such an entirely different side of her nature that they were altogether unprepared for the transformation in her manner, in her very expression of countenance, in her outlook on life. It was as though they had received a tremendous shock from an unexpected quarter; and they had to recover from it before they could even begin to see the incident in its proper light. After all, this stranger had only come amongst them on a business errand. If they had been forgetting the object of her visit, it was evident

that she had not. This was Rupert's view of the matter, as he drew himself up almost imperceptibly, and said, with an almost imperceptible curl of the lips:

"Of course your fee will be increased by reason of the unusual circumstances."

Tamar showed no sign that she had noticed either their amazement or the slight tone of contempt in Rupert's answer. She merely nodded as if satisfied that the matter had been decided, and went upstairs to fetch her coat and hat.

"Well, I'm blessed, she has got her eye on her money, hasn't she?" Tom said.

"Why shouldn't she, Tom?" asked Marion warmly. "You've got your eye on yours."

"We are entire strangers to her," remarked Rupert. "Why should she give her time to us for nothing?"

"If you thought like that, why did you treat her to a little dose of contempt, old thing?" said Tom with one of his grins. "It nearly withered me up."

"Couldn't help it," he answered. "I was so surprised. I hope she didn't notice it."

"I'm not so sure," Winifred said. "I think I'll follow her on to the moor."

"You'd better not," Tom said. "I may bag some of your share of the fresh plunder if we find any. Come on, girls; come on, Rupe. We've got to see this thing through. Perhaps we're going to dig out another thousand or two. Here, you can all go ahead, whilst I just run after her and make sure she's not using a cambric handkerchief."

"I'll come too," Marion said eagerly.

"I'm coming also," Winifred said decidedly.

"I ought to be the one to go, since I did the stunt,"

said Rupert. "I'd like to go. She has only just started. I shall soon catch her up. You others get to work, and I'll be back in a few minutes."

So it was the sound of Rupert's voice which made Tamar turn round on the moor. She went to meet him as he came towards her, and it crossed her mind that here was a man who had sacrificed health and youthful strength for his country, which really meant for thousands and thousands of people who were nothing to him except representatives of an idea — and here was herself, a grasping, avaricious woman, who had claimed extra payment for two or three hours' delay. No wonder he had not been able to conceal the contempt he had felt. What did he want with her now?

"I say," he said cheerily, "I've come to tell you that it's awfully marshy over to the left there, past that disused quarry. They all wanted to come and warn you, but I snuffed them all out and bagged the job."

She nodded.

"Thank you," she said. "I'll look out. I don't often go for walks. The country does not interest me as a rule. But I must say that this is a wonderful scene."

"Yes," he said, "I often used to think of these moors when I was at the front."

"Search that room well," she said. "Don't hurry over it. I don't suppose I'm really so pressed for time. And . . ."

She hesitated, and flushed a little. Capitulation was never easy to Tamar, but that wonderful expanse of wild moorland helped her.

"I take back what I said about an extra fee," she blurted out at last. "I don't want it."

She turned from him abruptly, and struck off on a track to the right. The dead heather and ling, brown as the dying bracken, but interjewelled with lingering heliotrope tints, was caught by the sun in a glow of radiant redness, the deep, fiery red of a blood orange. Then a cloud came, and the moor settled into sombreness, but broke out once more into an increased resplendency as the sun emerged and worked its will on the autumn glories of Nature.

Tamar, unaccustomed to watch Nature, uninterested in its varying phases and manifestations, was nevertheless held in wonder by the beauty which met her eyes, by the rolling expanse, by moor rising above moor in the distance, by the black clouds casting their shadows now here, now there, by the sunshine with its fitful triumphs, by the long grass shimmering with light and answering to the many voices of the wind. The clean, strong air swept through her, invigorating, purifying, liberating. She became aware, perhaps for the first time, that her aims, her plans were extraordinarily small, and that the horizon in her shop in Dean Street was painfully limited. Once or twice her friend, Christopher Bramfield, had hinted at this, and she had promptly snubbed him. Had he been right? Certainly for the moment, very unimportant seemed to her the successful business deals on which she prided herself, the precious stones on which she set such store, and infinitely contemptible the impulses of avarice, which more often than not determined her courses of action. At the back of her brain she knew that all values would return to their proper traditional proportions in her estimate, but for this brief spell they had shrunk to skin and bone.

Yet she argued with herself, too. Why should she be ashamed of her greed? She had never been ashamed before. There was no earthly reason, for instance, why she should have prolonged her stay amongst these people, except for the advantage of an additional fee. That was the right way to look at it. But when she had arrived at this consoling conclusion, the figure of Rupert, broken in the war, rose before her mind's eye. She caught once more the fleeting expression of contempt on his face, and she watched him limping towards her, the bearer of a healing message to obliterate the scar of scorn. And again she was ashamed.

Her mind turned to the war. The sight, the thought of his permanent disablement arrested her attention and aroused her sympathy. It was the first occasion on which she had been brought into any personal relationship with any one who had taken part in the war. So far, the war had meant nothing to her except in so much as it enabled her to drive a good bargain with those who came in their impoverished circumstances to dispose of their valuables. She had shown herself, as always, relentless towards these clients; and no tales of distress, and no pleas on behalf of soldiers, sailors, mine-sweepers or refugees had ever induced her to relax her demands. Except for the giving of an occasional cheque, after much reluctance and primarily to ease her own conscience, and to appease Bramfield, who, so she considered, was ridiculously interested in public affairs, Tamar had pursued her own unalterable course, untouched by the tremendous world-upheaval, by the tragic happenings of each day, by joyful tidings from the front, by ominous silences, by rumours of disaster, and stories of incredible cruelty and barbarism, by Bel-

gium's agony and France's noble endurance and our own record of British courage and sacrifice. Changing politicians, pacifists, conscientious objectors, and pro-Germans had held equal rank of an entire insignificance in her mind. The claims of a whole universe in travail had failed to break in upon her concentration on personal affairs within the four walls of that narrow world in Dean Street.

And at that time this was as true of thousands of other people as of Tamar. The message had not reached them. They took care that it should not reach them, even as Tamar had taken care.

She protected herself now. She switched her mind off from thoughts of the war aroused by Rupert Thornton's disablement, and switched it on to the collection of precious stones in Marton Grange. Yes, that star ruby was very beautiful, but not so perfect as the one she had at present. Would she care to acquire any of the gems for herself? Well, she must think over that matter. But there was no need to think twice where those four glorious pearls were concerned. Those she must and would have at any cost. What would she have to pay for them? Something in the neighbourhood of two thousand pounds, she supposed, unless she could manage to drive a hard bargain and get them for a few hundred pounds less. Perhaps that would be possible. She shook her head.

"No," she said aloud. "I must not behave badly if I can help it. I must pay a fair price to these people."

And she repeated with a sigh:

"It will have to be something in the neighbourhood of two thousand pounds, I fear."

Then she began to wonder whether the Thorntons had by now discovered the Bible box and the treasures it contained. If they did not interfere with that pile of papers, how was she to put them on the track without betraying the fact that she herself had already been exploring? How could she direct them? She could not direct them at all. Of course she could not. It would be folly. Out of protection to herself, she must remain silent and keep her own counsel. Supposing she did tell them what she had found in the night? Naturally, they could not be entirely sure that she had left the contents of the Bible box intact and inviolate. It was obvious, then, that she would rest under a suspicion which was, in the circumstances, perfectly natural and justifiable. If it were her case, she would undoubtedly take that view. Of course she must remain silent.

"It was hard enough to resist stealing those pearls," she said. "But to resist and then run the chance of being suspected — no, thank you. The idea might not occur to the others, perhaps, but it might to the elder sister, Winifred. She would reason it out on psychological grounds. I can hear her. No, it wouldn't be safe. I must leave the matter to chance, or to Tom. Mr. Tom will surely ferret them out."

She laughed when she thought of Tom. She liked him immensely. She liked his almost brutal frankness, half of it the outcome of high spirits, and half the desire to make his family "sit up." She was honestly glad that she had not cheated him of what he would have called "his plunder." Indeed, she was increasingly thankful that she had not robbed any one of them, for she liked them all, each in a different way. They

interested her, arrested her. She rather wondered how Mr. Thornton had been able to concentrate his attention on gems and maintain a truly sinister secrecy in the midst of bright presences which might well have evoked other sympathies and urged other claims.

Well, but at least he had had his wife and his children to whom to leave his treasures. Probably this had been his justification to himself both for his indulgence and his secrecy. He might even have been encouraged by the consoling reflection that he was accumulating treasure which would represent a fortune to them when he was dead. Her own mother, whom Tamar had adored, and from whom she had inherited her love of precious stones, had rejoiced not only over the gems themselves, but over the wealth which she was amassing for her child.

"One more treasure for my Tamar," she had said time after time.

It passed through Tamar's mind that in her own case no love, no concern for others, however remote or shadowy, had ever raised her own passion for precious stones to a higher plane than the one it now belonged to — the lust of rapturous possession.

When she at length returned to the house, Tom came dashing out to meet her.

"I say," he cried, "we're awfully bucked. We've found some more stones — at least, I've found 'em. And where do you think?"

Tamar shook her head innocently.

"I haven't an idea," she said, smiling a dove-like smile of detached innocence.

"Why, in that rotten old Bible box, under all the

rubbish-heap in the corner," he laughed. "Hidden away in an ancient backgammon box. Pearls and all sorts of things — spinels, for all I know. Sly old fox, the Governor! Changed his hiding-place, evidently! Come along and tell us about them. We're dying to know. I'll go and break the sad news to the Mater, and help her to recover from her preliminary weep, and then bring her down to the library. You really are top-hole to have put us on the scent."

"But I didn't put you on the scent," she said. "I — I wanted to — but —"

"Wanted to," he repeated. "Why, it was your stunt and no one else's. You seemed to be so sure, that you made us all sure too. So we persevered and turned everything inside out, and each time we were disappointed we kept on saying that if you believed it there must be something in it, and that you evidently understood the old Governor and knew what he was about. See?"

Tamar never disguised her feelings better than when she handled the newly-found stones, passed judgment on them and gave her opinion of their respective values. If her hands trembled when she touched the coveted pearls, no one noticed. The quiet indifference which she assumed when she remarked that she would rather like the first refusal of them, masked to perfection her yearning over them, her desire for them, her familiarity with them. The only sign of enthusiasm she allowed herself to show was over the spinels. There she was on safe ground.

"I knew that he would have spinels," she said triumphantly, "and beautiful ones too. These are very fine and interesting. And this is what is called a

'flame-red' spinel. It is rare and valuable. I felt sure he would have it."

"It would interest me greatly to know how you were led to that conclusion," Winifred remarked sententiously.

Tamar smiled indulgently.

"I could not explain," she said. "I admire them so much that perhaps I am biassed and think every one ought to prize them. Their range of colour alone makes them very interesting stones, and they are exceedingly decorative. Queen Elizabeth thought so. She had several amongst her jewels. Look at this 'flame-red' one, Mr. Tom. Don't you see the coal fire all aglow in it? That's worth a nice little sum."

"Let's hope," said Tom with a grin, "that you'll be seized with a whole series of convictions that there are more jewels hidden away somewhere or other in Marton Grange. Send me a wire, and I'll ferret them out soon enough — you bet."

"Tom, Tom," said his mother reproachfully, "surely we ought to be satisfied with what we have found."

"I don't imagine you'll find anything more," Tamar said thoughtfully. "I should judge that for a choice collection of this sort, it is now fairly complete."

"But," she added with a soft little laugh, "if I do have a series of convictions when I'm back in the shop, I must send a series of wires."

"Ah, that shop in Dean Street," said Rupert. "I'm longing to see it. I'm coming, too."

There was a chorus of agreement on that point, and a very definite decision that, whether Tamar liked it or not, they were not going to lose sight of her. They had all forgotten that she had given them a cold douche

by her sudden attack of business alertness, by her surprising transformation from a personal friend into a complete stranger making terms with them. And, indeed, for the whole remainder of the time she was with them — and they persuaded her to stay another night at Marton Grange — there was not a trace of the business side of her nature, either in her manner or in her remarks. Once again Tamar showed them the best part of her complicated character, and won them for her friends. When she left the next morning there was not one of the family who did not regret her departure. Mrs. Thornton found it necessary to call the cambric handkerchief into requisition.

Tamar at this juncture looked a little embarrassed and sheepish, for no one before had ever shed tears in parting from her — except, of course, tears of rage, of disappointed hopes and thwarted plans. Those she had ever been able to evoke by the bucket, by the gallon, and to ignore them with a cold indifference. But here was something of another order, something against which she had no weapon of defence, nor wished to have.

It intermingled with her other memories of the countryside: with the wide spaces of the far-stretching moors, with the wonder of their detailed and varied beauty, with the vision of the racing clouds overhead, with the rush of the strong, clean wind, uplifting, strengthening, purifying, with the sight of the shepherd passing through the village with his flock on his way to lower pastures, with the glacier-like greeting from the swift river, with the last good-byes to her new friends on the little station, with the sound of their cheerful voices, with the irresistible appeal of their youth.

CHAPTER IV

ABOUT two months after Tamar's visit to Marton Grange, she was standing behind her counter in her shop in Dean Street looking up some entry in one of the ledgers, when a new client arrived on the scene, a smart, fashionably-dressed woman, wearing long earrings, which always had the effect of irritating T. Scott. Added to this initial annoyance, was a sense of personal injury and even insult arising from the fact that this woman evidently knew how to hold her own in a business transaction, knew values, knew what she wanted, and was entirely unaffected by Tamar's glacial manner.

"I am prepared to pay three pounds seven shillings and sixpence for this crucifix," she said, her earrings bobbing as if in confirmation of this statement. "Not a penny more. It is not worth four pounds, and you know it."

T. Scott knew that perfectly, but it did not follow that she could not get a few more shillings for it, perhaps even a pound extra if she waited her opportunity of securing a more ignorant customer; and so she glared for a moment at this hostile personage, and then very slowly and deliberately, and without comment, replaced the crucifix in the window, and returned to her ledger as if there were no one awaiting her decision.

"Well, of all the rude people in the world," the woman exclaimed, "you take the lead. I certainly could not recommend any one to come here."

"No, pray don't," T Scott said grimly, without looking up.

The woman caught up her hand-satchel and flounced out of the shop in a temper, but had only proceeded a yard or two when she discovered she had left her umbrella behind, and she was therefore obliged to retrace her steps to fetch it. As Tamar turned round and saw her, she suddenly remembered that this little French crucifix had been rejected by two or three people who had been tempted to buy it, but had put it down directly they had touched it. She recalled one man in particular. He had shrunk away with a look of positive alarm on his face.

"Oh, no, no," he had exclaimed. "Something wrong there — something evil."

This thought flashed through her mind, and she decided that it would be as well to get rid of it to some one who, like this commonplace creature with the earrings and without fine perceptions, would be impervious to secret, subtle influences.

"You can have the crucifix for three pounds seven and sixpence," she said sulkily, for she grudged the concession whilst recognizing the wisdom which prompted it.

"Indeed?" the woman said in surprise. "So you've come down, have you? There must be some reason for that. I'd like to look at it again and be sure."

Tamar handed it to her again. She turned it over, examined it critically, seemed satisfied with the results of her scrutiny, and showed no signs of alarm to T. Scott, who was watching her face with lynx eyes. She put the money on the counter.

"I can find nothing against it," she said thought-

fully. "But there must be something, otherwise you would never come down in this fashion."

T. Scott remained like a sphinx, voiceless, expressionless.

"But I like it," the woman added. "I have looked at it many times in your window. I will take it."

In silence Tamar watched her departure, and when she was alone, she said aloud:

"On the whole, good business. Three pounds seven and six in pocket, and something of sinister influence out of the shop. And this reminds me of that rococo pendant brooch which scared some one a year or two ago. I'd better part with that. Very strange, these influences. Curious and incomprehensible. But real. And once or twice I have felt them myself. But only once or twice. Once in Rothenburg, at that shop opposite the cathedral — yes, I remember well — it was a little gold casket studded with emeralds. Spanish sixteenth-century — and . . ."

The door opened, and a very young airman leapt in gaily.

"Hullo," he said, "so here you are in your own dug-out. I'm awfully glad to see you."

Tamar laughed, and all irritating thoughts about well-informed women with long earrings, all business considerations and reflections on subtle and secret influences fell from her as a garment, for here was Tom Thornton, and with him came a rush of strong fresh air from the moors, a life-giving breath from the glacier river, memories of unexpected comradeship won from a purely business appointment, and a renewed exhilaration emanating from the magic influence of youth.

"I'm delighted to see you in my dug-out," she said.

"And you're a flying man, surely, aren't you? I should have thought you were too young."

"I've told a lie about my age, realized my ambition and got into the R.F.C. somehow," he said. "The usual patriotic lie, you know. And the result is I'm off to Oxford to the Officers' Cadet Battalion. Great, isn't it! I've always been dead set on aviation. And the Mater was such a trump about it. But, I say, what a top-hole hunting ground for plunder you have here. Talking about plunder, I turned Marton Grange upside-down, inside-out, after you'd gone. And the only treasures I found — in a locked cash-box which we had an awful time opening, were — not pearls, nor rubies, nor spinels — but an old toothbrush and a comb! A sell, wasn't it?"

Tamar laughed.

"I wish you could have seen me carrying that cash-box in triumph to the Mater's room," he went on, "and all the family following me in a solemn procession, and Winifred with her nose in the air and pretending not to care, except for 'psychological reasons.' Then I made them all guess what was in it. Rupert said Siam or Montana sapphires — he is always reading your book and knows it by heart — and Marion said diamonds. Winifred suggested pearls. The Mater wouldn't guess. And I said alexandrite cat's-eye, as it sounded rather swanky. Now, *you* would have guessed toothbrush and comb, without any trouble, wouldn't you? You'd have stuck to it through thick and thin that no collection worthy of the name would have been complete without those valuable varieties. And you would have been right, as before."

"Come into the inner room," Tamar said, "and

we'll have some tea. And you must tell me about the collection. I suppose by now all the stones have been sold?"

"Nearly all except the four pearls," he said. "They've been kept back for you to buy if you want to. The Mater was very determined about that. We all were. We'd have defended them from Christie's with our lives. Rupert is coming up one day with them. You're not going to be let alone by this family, I can tell you. As far as I can make out, we're all coming to camp here."

"So the pearls have been left for me to buy," Tamar said, her eyes suddenly bright at the prospect of possessing them. "I call that very considerate."

"Well, you discovered them, in a sense?" Tom said. "I think you ought to have had them for nothing."

"People don't give up valuable pearls for nothing," Tamar remarked drily. "I wouldn't. But I'm very glad to have the chance of buying them. I want them. I wanted them from the moment I saw them. I shall never forget . . ."

She broke off in time to prevent herself from speaking of her midnight excursion, but Tom did not notice. He was dashing about, looking now at this thing, now at that. He took it entirely for granted that he might make himself at home and that he was welcome. And indeed, so he was. Treasures hitherto solemnly sacred in Tamar's eyes, he treated with an easy familiarity which only caused her amusement. His happiness and high spirits gladdened her heart and quickened her steps as she set about preparing the tea; but he was with her instantly, snatching up the tea-tray from the kitchen table and rushing with it into the inner room

with an impetus which augured peril for some of the valuable old china lying about in a sequestered security hitherto unchallenged.

Over tea, T. Scott learnt the news of the family. Marion had become a nursing orderly in one of the Military Hospitals in London. Winifred had joined the Women Police Service. Rupert was trying to arrange Mr. Thornton's archaeological notes and complete his father's unfinished book. Mrs. Thornton was making comforts for the mine-sweepers, at Marton Grange. But the house was soon going to be shut up, and she was coming to London and was going to do needlework at a Red Cross depôt.

"Isn't it sporting of her?" Tom said. "She has bucked up tremendously lately. All our sweet relations are rather shocked at her, and think she ought to be passing her time behind the cambric handkerchief. But I'm glad she doesn't. And she has been simply ripping about us all. She didn't seem to mind how many lies I told to get into the running at once; and when I said it was the Flying Corps I'd set my heart on, she seemed frightfully pleased, and said that would have been her choice, and that she would be proud to have an airman in the family. She said we were all to be free, and that it was time parents left off being keepers of gaols from which their children longed to escape. Very decent of her, wasn't it, and cunning too? For, of course, the result was that no one really wanted to leave her when it came to the point."

So he rattled on, telling her details of his plans and prospects as if she had been a family friend who would naturally be interested in all he had to say; and the odd part was that Tamar, who had never before con-

cerned herself with the weal or woe of any people she had met in the course of business, listened to Tom, not with mere indulgence because she liked him, but with the settled attentiveness of some one who had the affairs of the family at heart.

Once or twice it struck her how absurd it was that she should be giving even a moment's consideration to the lives of these strangers of Marton Grange; but the thought was immediately demolished by a settled conviction that they were not strangers, and that ridiculous though it was, she had been knitted to them by the happenings of those two nights spent beneath their roof.

Tom's description of Winifred as a policewoman amused her immensely. Oh, yes, he said, she was the right type. Very smart and capable she looked in her neat uniform, and with all the virtues of all the centuries and of all the nations written large on her sensible countenance. Burglars and murderers, and all disorderly people, male and female, would certainly tremble before her. She had even intimidated Aunt Theresa, who had dared to assert that the jewels had got into their heads and that they were not mourning in the proper and accepted manner for the poor old Governor. Winifred's eye, with the help of her uniform, had quelled her in no time. A mighty useful thing having police officers in the family. Still more useful too if they had the power to arrest and detain all troublesome relatives. Jolly good way of stopping all interfering and mischief-making.

Tamar asked about Marion. Oh, Marion was all right, but she had been a bit odd about the jewels. No one had been able to induce her to annex any of them,

either the valuable or the inferior ones, for her own personal adornment. Now he, personally, would have liked Marion to have chosen the best diamond, emerald, ruby, pearl, sapphire and opal, and strung them all through her nose if she'd wanted to. But she didn't want to. She stuck to it that she would rather have had one poor little stone given direct by the old Governor than a whole lot from his collection now that he was dead. She did not wish anything kept back for her and unsold. This was the one and only occasion on which the Mater had shown any inclination to return to the embraces of the cambric handkerchief. Winifred had explained Marion's attitude as being a "psychological consequence"; and as no one knew what that meant, it had an instantly exhilarating effect on every one, including Marion herself! Of course, as he had pointed out, it was all the better for them if Marion did not want any private plunder, though she would have been welcome to it. But he thought that one day, not now, but later, when the psychological consequence had sort of died down a bit, he would like to buy a little jewel for her and give it to her direct. He could buy it from this very dug-out. He could choose something choice out of that safe, for instance, or perhaps out of a dummy encyclopaedia. Had Miss Scott one? Poor old Governor. He didn't really want to make fun of him, or be disrespectful to the dead. But he had been a queer one, top hole queer. Well, there was no knowing, perhaps he himself might develop into the same sort of character. If he did not get killed in the war, perhaps he too would collect precious stones and hide them somewhere. It was evidently in the blood. There was a family legend that his great-great-grandfather on the

paternal side had collected spear-heads or something, and his great-grandfather rubies. There was no doubt about the legend, but what had become of the rubies? That was what he would like to know.

His words: "*If I don't get killed in the war,*" spoken so lightly, and yet charged with every possibility of fulfilment, sent a chill through T. Scott's heart, and conjured up a picture to her of young lives, gay, high-spirited, light-hearted young creatures like this Tom Thornton, cut down in their early days of splendour, wiped off from the face of the earth — thousands of them, tens of thousands of them. Up to now their fate had not concerned her at all, and the ever-lengthening casualty lists in the newspapers had been of less moment to her than the items of an auction sale at Christie's. Her view, vaguely outlined to herself, was that if people went to war, they must expect to get killed. It was a pity, but inevitable.

But she did not like to hear Tom hint at it, however casually. She frowned, stared in front of her, fidgeted, became immersed in thought, and finally nodded as if she had taken a decision of some importance. And it was important to her, for Tamar hated parting with the very least of her private and personal possessions, and she had determined to give this boy one of her most cherished treasures — an amulet supposed to be endowed with special protective virtues, and handed down to her from that mother whom she had adored. Very slowly, very reluctantly she went upstairs to her room to fetch it. Very slowly, very reluctantly she returned with it, and then, with face averted, as if she could not bear to be a witness of what she was doing, she held it out to him. It was a carved ruby mounted as a little

square pendant in gold and turquoise. It was Burmese, and said to be very old.

"For me?" he asked, blushing. "Oh, I say, how ripping of you. A sort of talisman, isn't it? I know the sort of thing."

"Against all dangers of the elements," she said in a low, chanting voice, as if she were a priestess of old performing some sacred rite, "against fire and water and earth and air, against all dangers, known and unknown, of all the elements, fire and water and earth and air."

She swayed gently to and fro to the rhythm of the words she uttered. The boy watched her in silence, caught suddenly by the solemnity, the mystic impersonality of her bearing. He told his mother afterwards that he had felt a bit nervy — as if spells were being woven around him, but that he would not part with that funny little old talisman for anything on earth.

But he did not, of course, know the nature of the sacrifice Tamar had made for him, nor the symbolism of her deed of gift. He was the representative to her imagination, suddenly awakened, of all the young boys at the front, or destined for the front, all in peril, and all in need of protection. And the talisman was offered to them, through him.

After he had gone, T. Scott, needless to say, had an acute attack of regret over her unnecessary anxiety on behalf of these boys taking part in the war, and over her entirely absurd generosity in giving away that much valued amulet. It danced before her eyes challengingly, tantalizingly, and she felt almost driven to follow Tom and demand it back immediately. But at

least she had the decency to recognize that she could not demean herself in that fashion, and that the only thing to do was to bear her loss until she got accustomed to it.

Regret and resignation landed her, however, in a very bad temper, and when some unfortunate customers came into the shop, a mild old gentleman and a still milder old lady, she was so rude and uncompromising in her manner that they withdrew in alarm, the mild old gentleman saying quietly as he opened the door and was safely on the threshold:

"We came to buy, Madam, not to be insulted."

Tamar only glared at him, and after their departure was increasingly annoyed with herself for having lost the chance of doing business with some one who bore every sign, well known to her by long experience, of a person whom she could have cheated comfortably, profitably and expeditiously. So that when Christopher Bramfield, her friend, the diamond merchant, arrived, he found her in one of her most disagreeable moods. She nodded sulkily, but took no further notice of him. He sat down by the counter and waited in silence, and with a half smile on his face; for he had seen her often in this unamiable frame of mind, and was not perturbed or angered, but only gently amused. Besides, she would not have been T. Scott if she had lost her power of being sulky, sullen, rude, unfriendly, hostile.

"T. Scott," he said, after a period of ten minutes or so, "I called in partly to tell you of some wonderful silver I've heard of in Holland, at a place called Egmond op den Hoof, near Alkmaar, which you ought to go and see without delay. And I also wanted to proffer my usual request, Tamar, that you would change your

mind and marry your old friend. But I must own that I don't appear to have struck on an auspicious day. So I think I'll defer that matter. You know perfectly well that I have loved you for years, and have always wanted you to share with me my life and my fortune. There the matter can rest — at least for today."

Tamar made no sign.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Have you been doing bad business?"

She continued faking up a rococo brooch as if no one were addressing her.

"Very interesting about the Thornton jewel collection, isn't it?" he continued cheerfully. "I don't know when I've heard such a curious story, nor been so pleased about anything. A nice family, and no mistake. Four magnificent pearls have been preserved for you to buy. If you don't want them, T. Scott, I should like them for one of my clients."

"You can't have them," Tamar snapped out.

"Ah," he said, with a laugh, "I thought that would wake you up. All the same, I should like them. And I made a handsome offer for them, too. But that young fellow, and, indeed, all the family, seemed prepared to defend them with their lives. You've won those people, Tamar. They think you are so kind and amiable. Well, of course you are when you choose, aren't you? We all know that."

A faint smile stole over Tamar's face.

"You can't have the pearls," she repeated. "And as for marrying you, Bramfield, you have heard my answer often enough, and why you continue asking me every year is more than I understand."

"It is more than I understand myself," Bramfield an-

swered, staring at the ground. Then he added in an entirely business-like manner, as if dismissing peremptorily all personal affairs:

"Well, you mustn't miss this chance in Holland. Submarines or no submarines, mines or no mines, you must go to Alkmaar and secure some of the good things left by old Herr Maas. I believe there are several specially fine *nefs*. Think of that. It's a rare opportunity, as you have always been dead set on Dutch ships. And there is no time to lose. I only heard the news today, but others will soon learn it, so we ought to be off at once — as soon as we can get permits. I'm going to Amsterdam on business, and also I have to go to Rotterdam in connection with that American Commission for the Relief of Belgium I've told you of. You'll come there, too, won't you? It's a wonderful work, that. You ought to see something of it."

"Why should I?" she asked sulkily.

"Jewels of another kind, Tamar," he said gently. "Cargoes of real treasure in the Relief Ships — food for starving people."

"That wouldn't necessarily interest me," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"No, I don't suppose it would, now I come to think of it," he said with a smile which had some wistfulness in it. "Well, you could knock out Rotterdam. And in any case, you'll see my friend, Miss Linton, who is helping with the refugees at Flushing. I rather think you would like her. She does put her heart into her job."

"Does she?" said Tamar with indifference.

And she added:

"I don't know that I want to go to Holland just at

present. Are you absolutely sure that the *nefs* are exceptionally fine? "

"Yes," he answered, "absolutely sure. Make up your mind to come, Tamar, and be pleasant about it. We'll have a nice outing, and it will do you good to get away. All sorts of things are happening in the outside world, and you are caged up here as if you were a prisoner."

Tamar looked up.

"I don't mind telling you, Bramfield, that I've felt a little like that lately," she said.

"I'm delighted to hear it," he said as he rose to go. "You think it over and let me know what you decide, and I'll make all the arrangements. I had a letter from Bruce today. He's all right and in good spirits. Such a relief to my mind."

"Poor old Bramfield," Tamar said with sudden kindness, her face taking on an expression which made her look beautiful. "I'm glad you have had good news from your boy."

His own face lit up with pleasure at the change in her.

"Bruce has been mentioned twice in Dispatches now," he said proudly. "Lucky young devil to be able to fight for his country. One of the First Hundred Thousand, Tamar, one of the First Hundred Thousand. Nothing can take that from him — or me."

He looked a proud figure of a man as he stood for a moment by the counter. Tall, refined, and almost handsome in feature, and with bright eyes that could dance in merriment, and a spirit that was informed with chivalry, and a restless energy that had something boyish in it, Bramfield was a most engaging personality. He did

not look his fifty-seven years, for his hair had refused to accept more than a mere sprinkling of grey, and his heart would never have been able to grow old. It ever renewed itself to meet the demands made on it by countless people and countless things. And he was constant — obstinately so. He had been a widower for about sixteen years, and certainly for ten years he had been trying to win Tamar, and without much encouragement, if indeed, with any. It was surprising she did not encourage him — surprising sometimes even to herself.

Some such thought passed through her mind when he had gone. She sat for a long time wondering why she could not bring herself to give up her liberty and marry him. Then her thoughts turned to business. He was right in saying that she ought not to miss the opportunity of securing those Dutch *nefs*. She had always had a great liking for them, and had never failed to find them a profitable investment. Perhaps she would go to Holland. Yes, she would. It would do her good to leave the shop for a little while. Bramfield was right again about that. It did seem a prison sometimes. Its walls, more than once lately, had seemed to press closely round her, limiting her breathing space and her outlook. She remembered that this idea had occurred to her on the far-stretching moors at Lallington. The moors instantly recalled to her Marton Grange, the Thorntons, Tom — and the amulet.

Yes, she must battle with her regret in having parted with the amulet. For it was sacred, mystic. To impair by wrong thought the power of its protectiveness was an act of profanity at which she might well shudder.

So Tamar wrestled with her difficult temperament,

suffered, won through by heroic persistence of good intention, and reached the stage of peace and impersonality when she could once more with solemn dedication repeat the words:

"Against all dangers of the elements, against fire and water and earth and air, against all dangers, known and unknown, of all the elements, fire and water and earth and air."

CHAPTER V

TWO or three days before Tamar went to Holland, Rupert Thornton came to the shop and received from her the same kindly welcome which she had accorded to Tom. As he did not mention the pearls, she forbore from alluding to them, although thinking of them all the time, and with a heartache to have them safely in her possession.

Instead of betraying her excitement, she suppressed it by her remarkable self-control. She showed him some of her precious stones in her safe and some of her other treasures, such as Limoges enamels, Battersea enamels, snuff-boxes, *bonbonnières*, George II silver, rat-tailed table-spoons, and a Charles I small silver-gilt bowl. One of the snuff-boxes, of Siberian onyx, French eighteenth century, greatly took his fancy, and he learnt from her that the South Kensington Museum wanted it from her and would never get it. She showed him choice bits of china, Chelsea, Bow, Derby, and Derby-Chelsea figures, some exquisite little Chelsea scent-bottles modelled as hens and chickens, and lovely specimens of Spode and Worcester and Chinese. He was so genuinely interested in everything she brought to his notice and all she told him, that it was a pleasure to take the trouble on his behalf. And he was positively thrilled when he saw the original costly plates of the illustrations to her book on Precious Stones.

Perhaps Tamar gave herself all the more pains to please him because she remembered with some lingering

uneasiness the scorn of his manner that morning at Marton Grange, when she suddenly stipulated for an increase of her fee. She had had every right to look after her own interests, of course, and his attitude of mind on the occasion had been unwarranted and impertinent. Yet she had not been able to dismiss entirely its effect on her. Even now she found herself vaguely hoping that she might behave with a decent amount of restraint and a minimum of avariciousness if it came to a question of doing business with him in connection with those coveted pearls. She could not have explained to herself why she, usually entirely regardless of any criticisms passed on her, should care in this special instance to win a good opinion, or at least not to hazard a bad one.

But the truth was that she realized dimly that here was some one who had faced large issues, had been swept off from a plane where details mattered, personal considerations counted, and who had found a footing in a realm where new values, different proportions, had the effect of changing the old currency into something base and useless and grotesque. Yes, that was how Rupert Thornton would probably regard her driving instinct for good business. She was determined to protect herself from the discomfort of further scorn, however slight, however involuntary. She made up her mind to offer for the pearls three hundred pounds over and above the figure quoted for probate, which she remembered was two thousand pounds.

"They're worth it," she said. "I shall get the money back. And there is my pride. I suppose that is worth something."

And then she laughed aloud, for it was certainly the

first time in her business career that T. Scott had ever yielded an inch of ground to such an alien attribute of her character as her pride.

"Why are you laughing?" Rupert asked. "I suppose I made a bad shot at the age of this — *bonbonnière* you call it, don't you?"

"You were only a century out," Tamar said. "That's nothing of a mistake for an amateur."

"Well, there's one thing, I soon shan't be an amateur if I go on learning about antiques at this rate," he said, smiling. "You really have been ripping to me. It has made me forget everything — all the things I wanted to forget, you know — and, by Jove, I've forgotten about those pearls, too —"

"Ah," said Tamar, innocently and with a detached manner, "the pearls."

But her heart gave a bound as he took a little packet from his waistcoat pocket and laid it on the table. It was all she could do to prevent herself from snatching it up. And, indeed, if Rupert had been observant, he would have noticed that her hands were trembling as he opened the packet and displayed the four pearls.

At first she did not touch them, nor did she speak a word. She simply gazed at them, feasted on their beauty, their delicate pale-pink colour, marvelled at their lustre, their texture, worshipped them as objects worthy of adoration, in an ecstasy entirely divorced from any thought of gain and profit and material advantage. Other thoughts would come, of course, and quickly too; but Tamar's first sensation on seeing any precious stones was invariably pure and passionate joy in their mysterious beauty, even as a worshipper of Nature might revel in the glories of a sunrise, the mists

lifting over the mountains, the moon casting its silver radiance on the sea.

At last the spell was broken. Ecstasy gave way to business. Pride was forgotten. Greed stepped in. She resolved to depreciate them and try and secure them for as little as possible. She examined them, and after another period of silence said in that dreamy tone of voice she always used when she was beginning to deceive and cheat:

"Your father's judgment, excellent though it was, seems to me to have been a little at fault in the case of these pearls."

"At fault?" Rupert asked in surprise. "Why, I understood that they were peerless. Mr. Bramfield thought so when he saw them."

"Oh, I don't mean to say that they are not exceedingly beautiful," T. Scott went on unperturbed. "But if your father had known a little more about pearls, he might perhaps have rejected this one, for instance, having regard to the fact that he evidently had his mind bent on acquiring perfect specimens. You know, it is quite possible to be an expert in precious stones, and yet have no discrimination where pearls are concerned. My friend Bramfield is a case in point. He knows something about them, of course, knows a great deal about them, but not everything. I suppose he told you that this one was equal to the others?"

"He said when I saw him the other day that there was nothing to choose between the four of them," Rupert answered quietly.

"Exactly," Tamar said with a slight smile. "But I don't take his view at all. They are all very lovely. But I personally would put the greatest value on these

two, the next on this one, and certainly the least on the fourth. The fourth is considerably inferior in delicacy of colour and in lustre to the others. It may have deteriorated with age."

"Perhaps, after all, you wouldn't care to buy them?" Rupert asked, entirely dashed by her criticism and want of enthusiasm.

"Oh, yes," T. Scott answered indifferently. "Oh, yes."

She closed her eyes and appeared to be making some calculations. At last she said:

"But owing to the comparative inferiority of the fourth, I don't see my way to offer more than two thousand pounds for them."

"Two thousand pounds?" Rupert repeated slowly, as if asking a question. He raised his eyebrows, coughed a little, fidgeted with his stick, and seemed altogether embarrassed. Then he took courage and said courteously:

"We could not let you have them for two thousand pounds. We have had several better offers than that. I can't tell you how sorry I am to refuse your offer, but I have to consider our family interests. It is a brutal thing to say, but, after all, one can't give away a large sum of money just because —"

He hesitated a moment, and added bravely:

"Because you happened to come and bring us good news. That is, of course, what one would like to do — indeed, give them away altogether. But one cannot."

"Two thousand one hundred, then," Tamar said, ignoring his remarks, and suddenly seized with the fear of losing the pearls altogether.

He shook his head. His face had clouded over, and

the increase of her offer had evidently annoyed rather than tempted him. He replaced the pearls in the case.

"You'll excuse me if I tell you that I did not come here to bargain with you," he said, with a slight smile which was not pleasant. "That's not in my line at all. I brought the pearls simply to fulfil our promise of giving you the opportunity of securing them, if you wished, at a price which would not put us at too great a disadvantage. But your offer falls several hundred pounds short of what we are entitled to expect. Well, that ends the matter."

Rage at having made the mistake of reckoning on his acquiescence, fury at the prospect of losing the sea-gems on which she had set her heart, drove Tamar to an indiscretion which she regretted immediately afterwards.

"Bargaining with you," she hissed out. "Rather call it bestowing money on you. Why, I could have taken the pearls if I'd wanted to, and no one would have been the wiser. I found them. I knew they were there. No one else knew."

"*You knew they were there*," he repeated, starting back. "How did you know? And if you knew, why didn't you tell us?"

Tamar did not answer. She leaned forward, her arm resting on the counter in her favourite position, her eyes staring straight in front of her, and her mind riveted on the fact that she had been a fool to commit herself and put herself in the power of any one to doubt her, suspect her and condemn her. In that brief interval her brain tried to find a way of escape from her dilemma, but without success. She realized that she would either have to remain silent or speak the truth.

Which should it be? She did not often speak the truth, the whole truth, but here was a case in which only the whole truth would suffice. And there was a chance that the young man who had vision, might understand if she told him the entire story, without reservations. Yes, having got herself into this complication, it would undoubtedly be better for her to be frank; but even at this critical moment it struck Tamar as being grimly humorous that she, of all people, should be forced to frankness by an embarrassing situation created by herself and no one else. The pearls, beautiful though they were and of a liquid loveliness such as one might dream of with rapture, were not worth this annoyance; neither were the five or six hundred pounds which she had hoped to lop off easily from their price. Ah, how would it be if she were to offer him two thousand six hundred pounds now — or even seven hundred — a large sum of money — a cruel outlay — but at least a useful one — the price of not placing oneself in another person's power. And she would get the money back. Yes, she might try this means before she resorted to frankness.

But when she looked up and saw the expression of quiet determination on his face, Tamar recognized that he meant to have his answer, and that no bribe of money would influence him.

"I repeat my words," he said. "How did you know? And if you knew, why didn't you tell us?"

Tamar sighed, and with that sigh capitulated to circumstance.

"If you'll sit down and not stand over me menacing as though I were a German prisoner, I will tell you," she said in a low voice.

He relaxed and sank into the chair. Tamar, still

bending over the counter, told Rupert the whole story. She omitted nothing. She closed her eyes, shut out the world, opened her soul. Rupert, hostile at first and shocked at her exhibition of greed and her deliberate attempt to cheat him, soon lost all sense of animosity, and was caught by the interest of the psychology which unfolded itself as she proceeded with her narrative.

He learnt again that it was the absence of the spinels which made her feel entirely certain that there were other jewels concealed in some other hiding-place. In Nature, the spinel dwelt side by side with its patrician relative, the ruby, and no collector with enthusiasm for his subject would dream of excluding the poorer connection, which, moreover, was a most interesting stone in itself. He heard how with this idea burnt into her brain, she fell asleep, and in her dreams held intercourse with his father. And what more natural? They were jewel lovers, both of them. Their minds were one. Their spirits were in sympathy. Almost had she invoked him by her understanding of him, by her interpretation of him.

"Yes, yes, I believe that," Rupert said, stirred to his inmost soul. "If we can reach them at all, it can only be by the larger knowledge of them which only seems to come through death."

And after that, he followed her breathlessly down the stairs, through the hall, into the library. He knelt with her beside the Bible box, and with her, hesitated to open it lest it might contain nothing to offer except a disappointment of hopes, and then with her, suddenly unfastened the unlocked clasp and took out the flame-red spinel, and the rose-pink beryl — all the stones and the

pearls — those four pearls of magic beauty, those sea-gems of wondrous lustre.

With her, he passed through an ecstasy of joy over the beauty of them, the wonder of them, the mystery of them. He, too, desired to possess them, to steal them. Why not? No one would know. The house asleep — no sound except the raging of the wind. The opportunity of a lifetime — almost a permission given by the dead. Why not?

With her, he resisted, painfully, reluctantly, with the utmost difficulty; with her, he restacked the newspapers and books on the top of the Bible box. With her he fled from the room before the temptation had time to reassert itself.

Tamar ceased, and her listener leaned back in the chair and drew a long breath.

"Now you know what I mean when I say I could have had the pearls for nothing," she said, after a long pause.

He inclined his head as if in assent.

"I resolved not to speak of my search," she continued after another pause. "No one would believe that I had not stolen, if not the pearls — well, some other stones. I should not believe it of any one myself. I wished to protect myself by silence, and I should have continued to protect myself if I had not made the blunder."

She broke off, for he got up suddenly and stood before her, with his hand stretched out for her to grasp.

"I believe you," he said kindly. "Indeed, I believe you. And as for the blunder — and — everything else — well, what does it matter? Let's wipe out the re-

membrance of it and begin again. Do you still want the pearls?"

"I shall always want them," Tamar answered. "I might not see them for ten years, for twenty years, and yet I should know them anywhere — and always desire them, as much, even more, as when I found them, alone, in the silence of the night."

It crossed his mind that he ought to let her have them at her own price. And then as suddenly the thought presented itself that he would be offering her an indignity by making any concession to her in return for her frank confession and for her resistance to temptation. So instead, he told her again that she could still have them when she wanted them for two thousand, seven hundred pounds. In her shame she was grateful to him for not having offered her any easier terms. Her greed made way for her pale ghost of pride which she had hustled out and Rupert had beckoned in. She never forgot that.

"Thank you," she said gently. "I accept your offer. And I thank you still more for your words of belief and trust and your chivalry. It is chivalry."

"Is it?" he said with a laugh. "Oh, no, nothing as grand as that."

And with that same repudiation of unimportances which she had noticed in him before, he swept the sordid part of the incident on one side.

"In your dream," he said, "you've held communion with my father. I wish I had had that luck. I have never yet dreamed of him since he died. But I'm going to tell you something that I've never told any one — not even the girl I'm engaged to. I haven't spoken much of my experiences at the front. One cannot.

Partly one wants to forget. One has to — if one is going to keep sane."

He paused a moment, wrinkled his brow as if remonstrating with himself, and then went on:

"We were on the Aisne. We'd just about reached the German trenches, when I was caught by an explosive bullet in my left leg, and that did for me. Our fellows were driven back again, and I was left behind. I was too near the enemy trenches to be noticed. I was right up against his barbed wire. I managed to creep into a shell hole about ten yards off, and there I lay for four days in No Man's Land, with nothing to eat and nothing to drink, for by some mischance I hadn't even got my water-bottle on. I gave first aid to myself, of course, and did what I could for myself, but I was pretty bad, and suffered a good deal and lost strength. I knew that if I could not manage to save myself, I probably couldn't be saved, as I wasn't likely to be found right out there in No Man's Land. I was not unconscious any of the time. And I didn't think about anything much except how to keep my senses. I sort of focussed on that — endurance, you know, dogged patience, stubbornness — I don't know what you call it. I said to myself a thousand times: 'If I keep my wits about me, I may save myself. If I lose them, I'm done for.'"

He paused again, and Tamar stirred in her chair. She glanced at the pearls after which she had been hankering with an inordinate greed, and they seemed to her like dross.

"You'll wonder why I am boring you with all this," he said, "but I'm coming to the point now. My thoughts did not turn to my home and my home people

— except once. If I thought of anything at all except what I've told you, it was about my comrades, how they'd got on and about our guns, and about the madness and silliness of nations killing each other off at the beck and call of kings and politicians. I do remember that crossing my mind once or twice. But when I was at my lowest, and was about to give in, I suppose, a curious thing happened to me: I heard my father call me distinctly. And a great and sudden yearning came over me to see him again. I had always loved and admired my father, and would have liked to be nearer to him. But he was a strange being, given over entirely to his archaeology, as we thought, and he wasn't very much interested in his children. Marion was the one who was most intimate with him. But on the rare occasions when he was willing to be bothered with my companionship and called out for me to go on the moors with him, I was ready enough, I can tell you. And I was ready enough when I heard him in No Man's Land calling to me so clearly. So I gathered together my last remaining bit of strength and courage, and began to crawl to our own trenches. It took me three days to reach them. I came in at dawn. When I was within a hundred yards of them, the stretcher-bearers saw me and got me. But if it hadn't been for my father — well, I shouldn't be here. That was communion of some kind, wasn't it? And from all I can gather, it took place just about the time he nearly died. He rallied for a time, it appears, and lived a few weeks longer. And now I ask myself, have I lost the old father for ever, or have I just begun to find him, the barrier of life being broken down, and the secret of his temperament disclosed — and explained by you? For you have ex-

plained a good deal, interpreted, alleviated, reconciled. I feel enormously grateful to you. I want you to know that. It is because of this that I wished to tell you about No Man's Land."

He ceased. Tamar did not utter a word. The bare tale, with all the things it left unsaid, the record in some respects perhaps of thousands, gripped her, clutched her. The battlefield, modern warfare with all its fearful developments, suffering, helplessness, despair, endurance, courage, hope, pluck, failing strength, a dying down of resistance — and then at the last a spiritual rally, an answer to the last call of some one loved and looked up to though almost inaccessible — and yet potent and powerful in the hour of need.

When at length Tamar spoke, it was almost in a whisper.

"Surely," she said, "it is that you have only begun to find him. Life is the great barrier — not death. At least, that is my own secret experience."

She packed up the pearls and handed the little parcel to him.

"Take them away and keep them a while," she said. "I shall still want them, and will buy them from you at their proper value. But not now. For the moment they appear to me worthless, and worthless all the precious stones stored up for us by Nature in rock or gravel bed — rubies, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, opals — all of them."

And alone, she faced her greed, and was bowed with shame.

CHAPTER VI

TWO or three days after the episode of the pearls, T. Scott and Bramfield went to Holland. T. Scott's last day was a busy one. Sellers or buyers came in an endless procession, and when she made up her books that night, she purred over the discovery that, regarded from every aspect, it was one of the most satisfactory business days ever experienced in the shop in Dean Street. For she had acquired fresh stock at exceptionally low prices, and got rid of many objects of inferior value at refreshingly high rates. Not once had she made a mistake. Not once had she yielded a point. She had, in fact, been at her commercial best, and had entirely recovered from that passing attack of madness when pearls and precious stones had appeared to her as so much dross, worthless, despicable.

Rupert Thornton was her last visitor, and he came neither to buy nor sell. He brought his fiancée, Dorothy Hall, to present to Tamar, and perhaps that pleased her more than anything that had happened to her for a long time. For it showed that he had forgiven her and did not despise her. And probably he meant her to understand his visit in that way.

"This is my wife-to-be, T. Scott," he said proudly. "'Chauffeuse' in the Motor Ambulance Section of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps, known as the 'F.A.N.Y.'s.' When she has a little time to spare, we are going to get married on the strength of all the jew-

els which turned up unexpectedly. Ripping, isn't it?"

Tamar nodded. She liked the look of the young woman in khaki uniform. She had seen women in increasing numbers in uniform in the streets, but had not taken any interest in them. She understood vaguely that they were the outcome of the war, and were doing new things; but as the war was not her concern, the various changes and innovations taking place in rapid succession around her had impressed her surprisingly, contemptibly little. Now she was brought into direct contact for the first time with a materialized specimen of a new type, and her mind, ready enough for impressions when she chose, leapt out to meet the occasion.

"Ambulance chauffeuse," she said, in a tone of voice which evinced friendly interest but no surprise. "Well, you look ready enough for anything."

"I am," Dorothy Hall laughed. "Like all the women, if the Government would only use us. However, they will have to in time. And meanwhile we are training."

Tamar learnt that the corps, rejected, of course, by the English Government, had offered its services to the Belgians, and had worked for them ever since. The girl had been attached to the corps from the beginning, but had come home for a few weeks to collect money for supplying clothing, comforts and dressings for the men, and also for running a convalescent home for typhoids. She was off again shortly. Their commandant had all sorts of schemes on hand, and she was hoping to have a very much larger fleet of motor ambulances to proceed to the front and carry wounded from the advanced dressing stations to the nearest hospitals.

"Before we are dead and buried," Dorothy ended up with, "we hope that the R.A.M.C. will take us on. Meanwhile we work and don't weep!"

Tamar liked her. She was a fine-looking young creature, with soft dark brown hair, keen eyes and a fresh complexion. She was strong and well set-up, and gave the impression of quiet reliability. She was very keen on her job, but not at all "swanky." And in her way she seemed greatly attached to Rupert, and proud of what he had done and been through.

"One of the first to serve his country," she said. "And hating war and everything to do with killing. And yet up he sprang and went off with the first Territorials. I must say I should have hated him if he hadn't!"

Tamar was in mighty good humour owing to the successful transactions of the day. Rupert's forgiveness had increased it, and she was really glad to have the companionship of these two young people, lovers and comrades too, who seemed so happy and direct and free, and whose laughter sounded like gracious music in the shop and started her thinking vaguely of some of the things she had missed in life, ignored, brushed aside, undervalued. She did something which surprised her and made her smile grimly in the very act of perpetration. She thought of Mrs. Bridge, her old char, and of how astonished she would be if she knew of this extravagance. She opened, in fact, a pint of golden Tokay, several bottles of which she had prized and hoarded for years, produced some beautiful old liqueur glasses, and slowly, rather grudgingly, poured into them the rich-coloured liquid, the very shade itself of golden beryl.

She raised her own glass, into which she had poured a few drops only.

"To love and young happiness!" she said, smiling at them benevolently.

"Why, it's like drinking jewels," Rupert said, smacking his lips. "Never have I tasted anything so delicious."

"Nor I," said the ambulance driver. "It must be nectar itself."

Tamar nodded approval of their comments, but corked the bottle with anxious haste.

This little incident gave T. Scott a happy send-off to Holland, and when she met Christopher Bramfield at Victoria Station she was at her best, jubilant over her good business, content to shut up her shop for a short time, and relieved to have swept all her remorse away, and frankly glad for this outing and the break in her life. Bramfield was in splendid form, and delighted to get T. Scott to himself. He half wondered whether he might not safely risk proposing to her again since she was in such an exceptionally pleasant mood, and, for her, quite human. But he wisely decided not to jeopardize this chance of happy camaraderie, and contented himself with thinking how glorious it would be if they were really on their honeymoon. For he had always wanted Tamar, and always would want her. Never had he faltered in his love for her. Nothing had ever changed the nature of his devotion, neither her sullenness, her sulkiness, her rudeness, her graspingness, nor her silent, secret loyalty to some one whom she had loved in the past. Once only she had spoken of it.

"You know, Bramfield," she had said. "I've had my

own little bit of romance. I'm not hypocrite enough to pretend that having had it, I'm immersed in the memory of it to the exclusion of every other thought, interest and possibility. That, I believe, is the usual attitude of mind insisted on by writers of fiction. But in real life people pass on. I've passed on. The chapter is closed. Other chapters have followed and will follow, but there could never be, in my remaining years of record, a repetition of romance. Never. This is my answer to you, and you must accept it as final."

But he never had accepted it as final, and did not now accept it, even though he acted his part to perfection as an old friend of long-standing who wanted to give and take only friendship and that settled intimate but impersonal sympathy arising out of interests and enthusiasms shared in common.

They had a good crossing immune from mines and submarines and landed safely at Flushing, where an amazing and a moving scene awaited them on the station-platform. It was crowded with hundreds and hundreds of refugees fleeing from the German invasion — priests and sisters and peasants laden with their possessions, old men and aged women, and young children with their dolls and toys, and fishermen with their nets, and prosperous people with their personable luggage, all alike, rich and poor, old and young, seeking safety, somehow, somewhere, in those early days of overwhelming panic. Bramfield fell in with a Canadian journalist friend who had just arrived from the Belgian frontier, where he had witnessed the bewildering, heart-breaking sight of thousands of the terror-stricken inhabitants of the invaded country pouring as an avalanche into Holland. He had dashed off an appeal to the Canadian

public for funds in aid of the American Commission for Relief in Belgium, and when he had cabled it, he returned to the refreshment room to ease his spirit by telling Bramfield some of the details which had touched him to the very depths of his nature. Tamar had never seen any one so moved. Her stony stare melted into something like understanding when he spoke to her and took it for granted that she also cared — that she also was appalled by the agony of Belgium.

This was Tamar's first realization of the results of the war. She had heard that there were thousands of Belgian refugees in England, but they had meant nothing to her; and the few stray ones she had seen, were rich Antwerp people who had come to her shop and spent their money lavishly. She had sold to them in those early days one or two of her most treasured antiques and several costly rings, and that was all she knew about Belgian refugees. But here she saw a state of things she would never have believed possible, and it flashed through her mind that the memory of the scene would be haunting, unforgettable. She said as much to Gertrude Linton, whom Bramfield had found immediately on their arrival. She had joined their little group, and, together with the Canadian journalist, had made a dash for the counter and emerged from the confused masses with coffee and sandwiches for Bramfield and Tamar and all of them. She told Tamar that she was stationed at Flushing, working both with our own Local Government, who were organizing the shipment of refugees to England, and the Society of Friends, who were helping the Dutch with their refugee problem in Holland. It was easy to see that she was the very one to cope with emergencies, for she was full of vitality

and resourcefulness, could speak to the peasants in something approximately like their own patois, and was evidently exceedingly human and kind, in a way, too, which imparted resilience and bestowed courage. She had dancing eyes and a gay laugh. Tamar had never met any one of this description before, and Miss Linton evidently produced a curious effect on her: for contrary to her usual habit of maintaining a sulky silence with a stranger, she felt positively impelled to speak to her about the tragic plight of all these people driven from their homes and villages.

"Wait till you see the barges and the concentration camps," Miss Linton said. "Then you'll know something about the misery of these poor Belgians."

"I shan't be seeing them," Tamar said curtly.

"Oh, but it's quite necessary for you to see them if you're going to help," Miss Linton urged. "Frightfully harrowing, of course, but one gets an insight and a grasp of conditions which one could not hope to get in any other way."

"I have not come to help," Tamar said sulkily. "I've come over on business."

Gertrude Linton glanced at her in surprise.

"Oh," she said, with a slight change of manner which seemed to denote that, such being the case, Tamar did not count. "I quite thought you were going to be one of us, as you were with Mr. Bramfield, who is so splendid. I don't know what we should do without him."

"What does he do, then, that's so wonderful?" Tamar asked.

"What doesn't he do?" Miss Linton answered. "Why, from the very beginning he looked after the refugees when they arrived in England. Night after night

he was at the stations, untiring, unfailing in his efforts. And he was one of those who put it to the Government that there should be some systematic handling of the sailings from here and the arrivals in England. Is it possible that you don't know? "

"No, I don't know," T. Scott said, half ashamed, and already a little uncomfortable at being regarded as an outsider, with interests distinct from those of this inner circle. With something like envy she watched Gertrude Linton passing amongst the crowd, talking now to this old peasant, now to this little child, and once she saw her bending down to a little fair-haired boy, touching him on the head, and holding out her hand with the words: "*Gi polk.*" (Give the hand.)

Later, she said to Bramfield:

"That Miss Linton tells me you've been concerning yourself about the welfare of the Belgian refugees. Is it true? "

"I suppose it is true," he answered a little shyly, for he had seldom if ever spoken to Tamar of his war activities. "One couldn't go on as if nothing was happening, you know."

"Well, I've been able to," she said grimly. "I can't deny that, can I? "

"No," he replied, looking on the ground. "But, somehow, one did not expect otherwise from you — didn't even wish it from you — on the whole."

She was silent, but his words, if he had only known, were a greater reproach to her than any reprimand. Others, presumably, were to be counted on, as a matter of course, to give themselves freely in this hour of emergency, to offer time, money, strength, enterprise, but she, Tamar, was to be exempted; and the only per-

son who knew anything about her, did not even dream of reckoning her amongst the number of willing helpers. That was what Bramfield thought of her. The realization of it stirred in her a vague feeling of uneasy discontent with her own aims and outlook.

Gertrude Linton and one of the members of the American Commission for Relief accompanied them that same afternoon to Rotterdam. They went to an hotel on the quay, and Tamar had a room looking right on to the Maas, and a view, therefore, of the shipping which delighted and almost excited her. For she was fond of any kind of watercraft. She loved barges, tugs, steamers, boats. In London they were almost her only pleasure outside her joy in her antiques and precious stones. Here then, at Rotterdam, she saw them in profusion, and could scarcely tear herself away from the window when Miss Linton came to fetch her down to dinner.

They were an interesting group in the sitting-room that night. Amongst them was the Rotterdam representative of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, whose headquarters were at Rotterdam. His charming wife was there also, together with two other members of the Commission. The American military attaché at The Hague, who had just been to Berlin to inquire into and arrange about further canal service for the fleet of barges which conveyed the food into Belgium, was also present. There was also a merry Canadian skipper, very popular with them all, who had braved the minefields in the dark and brought in a relief ship from Canada twelve hours before his time. He was really very proud of this feat, though when congratulated, all he said was:

"Well, well, the little children had to have their food as soon as possible, hadn't they?"

He addressed his question to Tamar, taking it for granted that she was pleased with his performance.

"Yes, they have had to have it as soon as possible," she repeated mechanically.

"Of course they had to have it," Captain Smith said, slapping his knee. "Why, my good woman, they're starving."

"Starving?" she repeated.

"Why, yes," he answered impatiently. "Haven't you seen the latest reports? They are enough to make one weep. Haven't you read about Malines?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "But I heard that newspaper man over there speak of things he had seen."

And she added, as if in excuse:

"I have only just arrived."

"Well," he insisted, "ask him to show you one of his articles. That will give you an idea."

It was Miss Linton who came to her rescue and diverted the skipper into another channel, a service for which poor Tamar was devoutly thankful, and which confirmed the good impression Miss Linton had made on her. But she was soon run in by an English lady living in Gröningen, who had come over to see what help and clothing she could collect for the English Naval Division and Belgian soldiers interned there. Very earnest and kind was this lady, but fiercely bent on saving the soul of the gallant sea-captain — so much so that it was understood by the little community that he was never to be left alone to her mercy.

"Any amount of mines and submarines," he said, with

a twinkle in his eye. "But not that kind of danger without due protection. I guess it's up to the Commission to provide me with a convoy when that good lady is anywhere around."

She was drifting, as usual, over to him, when the danger was averted by the arrival of a young Harvard undergraduate, the Commission's official messenger between Brussels and Rotterdam. He had been arrested thirteen times, and was "full of beans." He wore his passport framed and slung over his chest.

"Too boring to have to produce it each time," he said with a laugh.

He had been through thrilling experiences, some of which he narrated with great humour; but when he began to speak of some of the terrible sights he had seen in the villages, and the frightful stories he had heard, young and light-hearted and dashing though he was, he broke down. Nothing, he said, could exaggerate the misery of the land. The deserted fields were cemeteries of the dead. Women and children sought refuge in the ruins of their roofless homes and were terrified at his approach. He could never forget the fear on their faces. He had had a few provisions on him. When he gave them food, they kissed his hands.

He broke off when a man of military appearance, but in civilian attire and obviously a German, entered the general sitting-room where the company had assembled, sat down at a table at the farther end of the room and began to write.

A hush fell on them all. As long as they were alone and undisturbed, they had been talking freely about plans and difficulties and possibilities; but now their privacy had come to an end, and they had to be cautious.

When they began to speak again, their conversation was entirely non-committal, and could have been safely transmitted to Berlin without any pernicious consequences. Captain Smith, with a sly wink at the American Consul, began to talk about his favourite brand of whisky, really to tease the Gröningen lady, who looked at him reproachfully and shook her head sorrowfully. The official messenger became suddenly eloquent about the virtues of his grandmother in Colorado, the manager of the Dutch Shipping Agency Company, whose firm attended to the transhipment of the cargoes of food to Belgium and who had been arranging business with the Rotterdam representative, maintained an entire silence. Miss Linton broke out into a rhapsody on Dutch cheese, and reminded Tamar that Alkmaar, the place she and Bramfield were going to on the morrow, was the centre of the cheese trade in the North. The Canadian journalist took out his notebook and began to write another dispatch. The Belgian *délégué* of the Belgian *Comité de Secours et d'Alimentation* glared at the intruder with a fierceness which he made no attempt to control.

"A spy," Bramfield whispered to Tamar. "We shut up like oysters when he is anywhere near. One can't be too careful. They follow us about, watching and listening, hoping to pick up some bit of information. You'd better be on your guard whilst you're here."

"Well, they couldn't learn much from me, Bramfield, could they?" Tamar said quaintly. "No one could accuse me of having any information to impart on events happening outside my own shop."

He laughed and she laughed. It struck her as being exceedingly funny that he, of all people, should warn

her against spies. He saw the humour of his admonition and, tickled by the fun, continued:

"Now, mind, T. Scott, not a word about the changes in the Cabinet, nor speeches in the House of Commons; not a single word about conditions at home, nor strikes, good recruiting, bad recruiting, War Loans, war preparations, public feeling. Be as cautious, T. Scott, as though your country were a pigeon-blood ruby, flawless, and three carats in weight!"

"Your spy has only got one hand," she said. "His left one is false."

"Well, I've never noticed that," he said. "You're right, though. You have got lynx eyes."

"I've got some intelligence," she answered, with a smile.

When the German had left the room, Bramfield told the company about T. Scott's discovery. They seemed to think that they had all been singularly unobservant, and that she had found out something which might come in useful in some unexpected circumstances. It was only a little trifling incident, of course, but it had the immediate effect of giving Tamar a status amongst her new companions. And Bramfield was secretly delighted; it had positively hurt him to see her in their midst, an outsider, of no consequence, negligible. She might not care, he said to himself, but he cared; for he had been accustomed for years now to see her in her own setting, where she counted, controlled, ruled. Any position less than that was unthinkable for Tamar.

She did not sleep much that night. She watched the lights in the harbour, and thought about all these strangers she had met, whose eagerness, enthusiasm and disinterestedness were a revelation to her. None of

them seemed to be living a personal life nor to be interested in their own private concerns. As she recalled it, their entire attention was focussed on the problem of helping the refugees, housing the ones remaining in Holland, speeding on their way those who were going to England, feeding the seven million Belgians shut off from the outside world in Belgium, overcoming all the international difficulties of this gigantic task of amazing philanthropy, and planning reconstruction of their national life against the time when the war would be over and their land free from German occupation. When at last she slept, Bramfield's words were borne to her in her dreams:

"Well, one couldn't go on as if nothing was happening, you know."

"I've been going on as if nothing was happening," she answered.

"Yes, but one didn't expect otherwise from you," he said.

That was not pleasant to hear, even in a dream.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day Bramfield and Tamar went to Alkmaar, the centre of the North Holland cheese trade. It was a Friday, market day, and the "Dijk," the large square, was filled with gay-coloured carts of the boers of the surrounding villages, picturesque-looking traps, with lines of poetry painted on the tailboards. Thousands of pounds of yellow and red cheeses, each marked with the initials of the peasants, were spread out in front of the Weigh House.

They lingered a while to see this interesting spectacle, which, however, was familiar to Tamar as well as Bramfield, and then took the steam tramway to Egmond op den Hoof, which would bring them within two or three miles of their destination, the home of Weduwe Maas.

As they sped along the country, Bramfield said:

"It is amazing to think of the peacefulness on this side of the frontier and the agony on the other — only a few miles separating ordinary normal life from a tremendous tragedy. Here, these quiet little homes, prosperous and untouched; and over there, only ruin and desolation. One shudders lest a similar fate should overtake this land too."

But Tamar did not rise to the realization of such a possibility. She was attuned to business and her mind was only occupied with thoughts of the valuable silver collection belonging to Weduwe Maas. At that moment the fate of any nation would have been a matter

of entire indifference to her; and, so far as she was concerned, all the inhabitants of all the countries could have suddenly become panic-stricken refugees without disturbing her equanimity.

"Did you say there were three or four *nefs*, Bramfield?" she asked, ignoring his remarks.

He smiled indulgently.

"Four, I think," he answered. "I know that one of them is very beautifully chased, and another exceptionally large; but the best is said to be small and jewelled rather richly — quite unusual."

Tamar's eyes sparkled. She resolved to keep them some time for her own pleasure, and then sell them at a stimulating profit. When they got to Egmond, they secured a trap, and passed through more little formal villages, with their prim rows of trees painted blue halfway up the trunks, and their precise houses and neat green windows. Tamar became quite excited at the prospect awaiting her, but was rather cross when they arrived at a most evilly smelling village, the horror of which considerably modified her secret transports.

"What on earth have you brought me to, Bramfield?" she said.

He laughed.

"Never mind," he said. "It's worth it. Bear up, Tamar. Don't be cross. Four of your favourite *nefs*, and one of them jewelled. Remember that and keep your nostrils closed!"

They drew up at a comfortable-looking house, at a comparatively comfortable distance from the smell, and were received by a buxom woman of many petticoats, of course in peasant attire, and with the curious headdress of the district. Bramfield produced a letter to

show that he was the person with whom the family had been in correspondence, and before long Tamar and he found themselves in a large kitchen, with large chest and massive cupboards which would have delighted the heart of any lover of antique furniture. They were bidden to hospitality, for Bramfield had been introduced by one of the Weduwe Maas's oldest friends, and they sat down to coffee of fragrant brew, and bread, butter, raw salted herring, known as *pekel-haring*, and some very trying cheese, made from goat's milk, *schaper-kaas*, which was offered as a delicacy in honour of the guests. T. Scott, never an adept at courtesy or even the semblance of it, was prepared to refuse everything put before her, whilst her eyes roamed over the room, noting the beds in the wall and all the objects of interest, and trying to guess where the silver treasures were for which she had made the journey. Preliminaries were a bore to her, but Bramfield whispered to her that she really must put up with them and behave herself, and eat a lot of *pekel-haring* and *schaper-kaas*, and pretend to enjoy it.

"You'll give offence, Tamar," he said, "and then you won't find it easy to get what you want at a reasonable price, or perhaps you won't get it at all. Then you'll have made the journey in vain and wasted all your money."

The devastating thought of wasting money braced Tamar up to immediate control. She became gracious in her queer, sulky way, ate all the *pekel-haring* and *schaper-kaas*, nodded in friendly fashion when the Weduwe addressed her, ceased to stare at the furniture, and bowed at intervals to the furrowed old peasant woman, the Weduwe's old mother, who sat by the win-

dow, knitting, serene, smiling and pleased with the attentions of the guests.

At last Tamar was rewarded for her patience. She was taken to an inner room, crowded with possessions, and Weduwe Maas produced from a large chest a most beautiful little jewelled *nef*, such as she had never before seen. She wisely suppressed an exclamation of delight, but her eyes danced with glee. Three other *nefs* were in turn displayed, and silver candle-sticks, silver boxes, buckles, very large buttons, spoons, brooches, collars, head ornaments, head-dresses — all very old and fine.

Then the bargaining began. Bramfield stood enjoying hugely the contest between the two women. He did not remember when he had had such fun. It amused him to see that T. Scott had evidently met her match. She had to give in and pay a larger price than she was willing, not only for the Dutch ships, but for all the other things. The truth was that she had yielded because she had seen in the crow's nest of the jewelled *nef* a stone which she believed was a really fine emerald, and if that were the case, the victory was hers and Weduwe Maas badly vanquished! She chuckled over this uplifting probability, and kept the matter to herself for some time on their way back. She placidly suffered Bramfield to tease her about having found a worthy rival in the science of driving a hard bargain.

"I always thought you were top dog in that respect, T. Scott," he said, with a smile. "But plainly there are others who almost approach your high-water mark of perfection. The Weduwe was a tough one, wasn't she? You had to give in, after all, and let the old dame have her own way. Well, the *nefs* are all beauties, and I'm glad you've got them. It was worth while risking

the mines and submarines, coming this distance and eating the *pekel-haring* and *schaper-kaas*, wasn't it, and climbing down a little, though I suppose you won't ever admit that? "

"I sha'n't have to, Bramfield," she said at last, with a grim smile. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, there is an emerald in the crow's nest of that jewelled *nef* which is of real value. I may be mistaken, on such a hasty examination, but I don't think I am. When I suspected this, I thought it worth while to let Weduwe Maas have her own way."

He laughed.

"You're a wonder, Tamar," he said. "So that was why you were so compliant! No, I don't suppose you are mistaken, really. I have never known you to be — certainly not over emeralds. You have a natural instinct about them."

She nodded.

"Yes," she said, "my birth stones, you remember."

So back they came to Rotterdam, in great good humour, Bramfield delighted with the success of the expedition, and Tamar much elated by what she considered her triumph over the Weduwe's undoubted business qualities, and buoyed up at the prospect of the handsome profits she would be likely to make over her transactions of the day. She had forgotten about the war and the plight of the refugees and the fate of the starving seven million inhabitants of Belgium. Only the thought of the emerald in the crow's nest possessed her mind. Was she mistaken about it? No, impossible. On closer examination, would it indeed prove to be as flawless as she had judged it at first sight? Yes,

surely. Could she, by any chance, have been deceived about its grass-green colour? No, entirely improbable. But supposing such were the case, she had nevertheless secured for herself a sufficient margin for a profit by no means negligible. So really there was nothing to worry about.

Dominated by these questions and answers and by this consoling conclusion, Tamar sought the sitting-room, where she found the company reinforced by several other people, amongst them the President of the Dutch Committee for Support to Belgians, which was doing valuable work for the relief of their distressed guests, a Rhodes scholar who brought in a report on the distribution and redistribution of the food sent from the United States and the Dominions, and a councillor from one of the towns in Belgium, who had been released provisionally by the Germans to make some arrangements with the Commission on behalf of his community.

Captain Smith rallied her about her absence, and told her she had missed several interesting events, the most important of which had been the arrival of another relief vessel, containing several tons of condensed milk, so urgently needed to save the lives of the little ones. Also, eight barges, towed by four express tugs, had left Rotterdam with further relief for Brussels, to say nothing of the other barges dispatched in other directions.

"Now see what you've missed," he said. "Aren't you sorry?"

Tamar thought she was. Half willingly, half reluctantly, she felt herself being caught once more into the atmosphere of these people, who were subordinating

their own interests and concerns to the task of ministering to the helpless victims of the war. She began to be a little ashamed of her successful transactions at Alkmaar, and vaguely uneasy over her capacity for sweeping every other consideration aside when it came to the question of attaining her own personal aims and attending to her own private business. For the moment those beautiful nefs lost some of their value, and the emerald some of its grass-green colour. They were destined, of course, to regain very quickly their position of importance in her mind, but they were certainly relegated to the background as the evening passed. For, at the request of the Rotterdam Representative's wife, some of the appeals for help from the Communes were read aloud. Gertrude Linton read some, Bramfield others, the Representative others. The Belgian *délégué* began, but could not go on. It was more than he could bear.

Here are a few extracts of what that little company heard that evening:

"We beg to call your attention to our poor city. We have nothing here, and are most in need of food, beds, clothing, coals."— Dendermonde.

"I beg you to come to the help of our unhappy and most honest population, which is exhausted and deprived of all resources, as the result of the exactions and requisitions of the Germans. The population is principally composed of fishermen, workmen and small tradespeople, on whom famine and the blackest misery await if help is not brought to them."— Hejst.

"The population of my community comprises 5,000 souls. If you could come to our help, you would save

from death a whole population, which would be eternally grateful to you. That which exists no longer in my town is flour, coal and meat."

"Everything is missing. We are in want of potatoes, peas, beans, grain, flour, meat, bacon, clothes, wooden shoes. No petroleum is obtainable."

"The communal funds are finished, and if you come not to help us, God knows what will become of us."

"Our communes are without resources, and with them the benevolent institutions. We have finished our short report. We have not dramatized it. The facts are horrible enough, the miseries are so painful that we are unable to describe them rightly."

"In the name of humanity help us."

"Allow me to ask you not to forget the Belgian Luxemburg. This province is one of the first invaded, and is without any communication with the remainder of the country. Be kind enough to think of this province, which met with so much misfortune, like the others."

"At Andenne and Seilles hundreds of houses have been shot at and burned down. It is women, it is children that have been killed or made prisoners. At Tamines, at Anvelais, everywhere, in the cities and in the country, they accumulate the ruins and the devastation."

"Permit us to make an appeal to your great generosity in favour of the movement for the supply of milk for little children and mothers in our town. We have to rely on condensed milk, which, happily, a charitable soul has given us so far. Without that we should have to send the poor mothers away, and we have, alas, already been witnesses of more than one heart-rending scene of that nature. Condensed milk is therefore very precious to us, but we possess none."

"Alas, the children born during this war, of moth-

ers enfeebled by worries and privations, are very delicate."

"Flour is hardly to be obtained. The stock of meat and corn in Hamme will not be sufficient till the end of this year. This is a great ill when the winter is coming and is running with speed to our countries."

"Hamme's poor men pray their friends in America to allow them some assistance in these sorrowful moments."

"At last the moment has come to show how the Germans have acted since their arrival on our soil. Without any reason they have put fire to thousands of houses, and they have sacked those which were not destroyed; to put the crown on their work, in many districts they have shot the population without arms. In other places they have taken the civilians and put them in prison, with the consequences that all cities and villages are at present deprived of masculine population."

But although flour, rice, potatoes, peas, beans, wheat, sugar, wooden shoes, boots, clothes, oil-cakes for the few remaining cattle, milk and salt were all asked for, what was begged for most of all was bread and salt; and as Tamar listened to these appeals, so touching and dignified in their simple, bare statement of facts, she said to herself more than once that, whether she liked it or resented it, the truth remained that the words "bread" and "salt" were burnt into her brain for the rest of her life.

Sleep did not come easily to her that night, and when at last she sank into slumber, she was torn in spirit by conflicting dreams of starving people, devastated villages, fields of the dead, finely-chased nefs, *pekelharing*, a superb emerald, the worth of which was known only to her, and a Dutch *Weduwe* who believed, poor

soul, that she was the one who had driven a hard bargain and come off victor. Tamar woke up with a chuckle.

"Ah," she said aloud, "that woman little knows that it's I who have scored. For I cannot be mistaken about that stone. Impossible. Its colour was perfect. And it had an imprisoned beauty — a flaming splendour."

The next morning Tamar learnt that Bramfield and several others were going down to the docks to visit another relief-ship which had arrived from Philadelphia on the previous day. Bramfield did not ask Tamar to accompany them. He took it for granted that she would not be interested, but Captain Smith took it for granted that she would be only too glad to make up for her lost opportunity, and said:

"Why, I guess you're coming, aren't you? A very interesting sight. And as the good lady from Gröningen will be of the party, I'll need a large convoy to protect me from being converted to teetotalism. I guess I'll need all the people I can muster."

"I shall come," Tamar said. And if the truth had been known, she was glad she had been definitely asked to join the convoy.

So in about an hour's time, Tamar found herself in the brisk little steam-launch flying the American flag, which always took the Commission people on their river errands. Captain Smith, the lady from Gröningen, the Rotterdam Representative and his wife, Bramfield, the Dutch shipping agent, the Rhodes scholar and two American professors, together with T. Scott, made up the party. Gertrude Linton was not there. She had

had to hurry off to one of the refugee concentration camps at Bergen-op-Zoom, and when Captain Smith heard this tragic news, he shook his head sadly and gave himself up to his fate.

"She was a convoy in herself," he murmured. "A barrage through which nothing could break."

Off they started to the ship. On their way they passed in and out of the different harbours and alongside many wharves, and saw more than one Commission vessel with the Red Cross painted on its sides, and sheds full of cases of food and clothing from all parts of America and Canada being sorted out for dispatch to several destinations, and barges already laden with their cargoes and on the point of starting for Belgium. It was all very thrilling. Tamar, who delighted in shipping, was in her element. She noted every barge, every tug, every interned vessel, every kind of craft, and gave expression to her enjoyment in a way that amazed Bramfield. He had never known her so pleasant, so companionable, and so talkative. Nor did she forget to guard the skipper at a dangerous moment. Always at a crisis, T. Scott had a question to ask, and very neatly she achieved her aim. She was pleased when Captain Smith praised her and said she was almost as clever as Miss Linton.

At last they drew up near the ship, scrambled over two barges lying alongside and climbed on to the deck. They bent over into the hold, riveted by the sight of the vast cargo — 1,900 tons of rice, flour, salt, beans, peas, wheat and condensed milk. They were thrilled by the thought that this was only one of the many shipments coming into port day by day, and that they would continue to come with unfailing faithfulness from

all parts of America, from Philadelphia, Boston, New York, San Francisco, Maryland, Oregon, Virginia, from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain.

Tamar voiced the feelings of the whole company when, to her own surprise, she said aloud:

"Cargoes of Mercy."

And then Bramfield asked the Rotterdam Representative to tell them the story of the Commission for Relief. He told it. And as they listened, their imaginations were stirred by the idealistic as well as the practical aspect of this vast philanthropic undertaking, probably the greatest relief movement in history. A handful of business men, the Chairman of the Commission at their head, had made up their minds that the seven million starving Belgians in Belgium must be fed at the cost of any effort, however great, and that no difficulties, impossibilities or discouragements were to be allowed to deter them from the realization of this dream. He did not speak of the splendour of the scheme, the largeness of it, the underlying pitifulness and tenderness of it. He did not boast of the amazing fulfilment of it. He did not claim that it would make a proud record for the United States for all ages. He just gave them a simple and direct narrative of facts from which it was easy enough to build up a structure of idealism. He said it was the work for a great neutral power to do. And they did it. He told them that in the first cargo, largely printed on each case were the words: "*For our brave Allies.*" Needless to say, they had to be removed by the officials of the Commission, whose very existence, of course, depended on a strict observance of neutrality. He spoke of some of

the difficulties: difficulties of negotiating with the German Government for permission, complications with the Allied Governments, and political obstacles: precautions that the food supplies should be used for Belgians only: anxieties and hindrances with regard to transport, distribution and redistribution. Were the trains in Belgium running? Were the canals open? What was the condition of the canals, if open? Were they going to be allowed to use them for their fleet of barges lying ready to ship the food from Rotterdam to the various towns? Well, the difficulties and impossibilities were being overcome. All was going well. The machinery was being perfected. The vessels were being multiplied. Food and contributions were pouring in. An impending doom was being turned into a victory of peace.

"With brains like those of our splendid Chairman," he said, "and devotion like that of our good friend, the Captain here, and pluck like that of our official messengers and all our other boys, we can do anything. We can meet the appeals of the starving towns and communes with confidence."

Back to the minds of some of the listeners flashed the remembrance of those appeals which had been read to them the previous evening:

"Everything is missing."

"In the name of humanity, help us."

"Come to the help of our unhappy and most honest people."

Seven millions starving in their own country, crying out for bare necessities only — bread and salt. Ruined homes, wrecked towns, deserted fields of the dead, devastated villages, tragedies of outrage and brutality, ruth-

lessness in its ghastliest form, cargoes of mercy for these suffering millions — and the good ship on which they were standing symbolic of the whole wonderful scheme of merciful intervention.

They could scarcely tear themselves away. Tamar was the last to leave. She lingered behind, staring into that hold with its treasury of food. Bramfield touched her on the arm.

"Are you not coming, Tamar?" he said gently. "We're going to another wharf."

She followed him silently. He knew from the tense expression on her face that she was tremendously stirred.

They finished up the morning's expedition by a visit to a shed to see the Santa Claus presents of toys and goodies sent on the *Jason* by American children to Belgian little ones. Owing to the military regulations, all these gifts had to be forwarded without the loving little messages of goodwill and greeting which had accompanied them from America. Some of the pieces of paper were still scattered on the floor. Captain Smith stooped and picked one up. He read it aloud. It ran thus:

"Dear little Belgian Girl,

"I send you a doll and some pea-nuts. Also some candy. I am sorry you have a war in your town. We haven't had a war in our town lately.

"From your loving,

"Flossie T. Phillips."

"Well," he said, "you wouldn't think that document would be dangerous to the safety of the German Empire."

They laughed, and helped to gather up the inscriptions, which were entrusted to the care of the Representative's wife, with a solemn exhortation to make them into a book for Belgian children, in readiness for a better time to come. And meantime the joy gifts were taking their own joy messages to the little Belgians still in Belgium and the little refugees in Holland.

The next day Bramfield told Tamar in an off-hand manner that arrangements could be made for her return to England that same evening if she chose, but that he would be remaining for a few days longer. He had business to do for himself in Amsterdam, and several matters to attend to for the Commission and also for the Society of Friends with whom he was also associated in their refugee work.

"Probably you will want to be off now that you have secured your silver, Tamar," he said. "Of course, if you cared to stay on, there's a lot to see. We are going, for instance, to the refugee concentration camps at Rosendaal and Bergen-op-Zoom, and also to one or two of the barges, where there are still a number of refugees left. I want to make a report of the admirable efforts the Dutch have made on behalf of their uninvited guests. I think they have played up grandly, and have been fine and generous."

"I don't mind staying on," Tamar said, with a half smile which had a shade of self-excuse in it. "I don't mind going to see the concentration camps."

Bramfield, who had of course wanted her to remain, laughed secretly at the success of his ruse.

"She's interested, is T. Scott," he thought. "And she would sooner die than confess it."

But he was too wise to make any comment on her de-

cision, or to let any sign of pleasure or surprise be seen on his face.

The next day, a party of five or six of them, in two motors, started off for the refugee camps, taking Rosendaal first. They motored over the peaceful country, which looked so prim and self-contained, and they all thought and spoke with a shudder of pity of that sorrowful, mourning land over the frontier, but a few miles away, the prey of a cruel fate from which, so far, Holland had been mercifully spared. They crossed the river, passed through Dordrecht and finally arrived at the Hollandsch Diep. Here they had to wait an hour or so for the ferry. Very lovely looked the water, lit up by the sunshine of a beautiful, crisp morning. They drank coffee in the little restaurant, and strolled about. The Representative's wife, always so charming and companionable, rather wanted on this occasion to hug the stove; but as no one could do without her, she had to resign herself to a walk, equipped or not equipped for that American tragedy.

Bramfield was delighted to see how Tamar was enjoying the outing. And indeed she was congratulating herself the whole time that she had not been left out of the scheme. She seemed in such a good temper that he could not forbear from teasing her a little. On their way they had passed through several prim villages and one or two perniciously fragrant ones, which, he said, had reminded him of nefs and emeralds!

"I don't believe it *is* an emerald of any value," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "I think that old Weduwe got the better of you, Tamar. It will be a joke if she did."

"You rather seem to wish she had," Tamar said

good-temperedly, for at that moment the value of the emerald did not interest her in the least.

"Well, it would be fun for once, I must own," he said. "Please forgive me."

She laughed and forgave him. When she was amiable and at her best, she rather liked Bramfield to tease her. It was her way of accepting his offer of a mild flirtation.

But about ten minutes later, when they were bending over the side of the ferry and looking at the fine, long railway bridge which spanned the Hollandsch Diep, she suddenly said:

"I've never yet been mistaken about an emerald, Bramfield. Never."

"Well, it's time you were," he said cheerily. "Quite time."

And again she laughed.

They arrived at Rosendaal and went immediately to the refugee quarters there, which had been established in a large granary. They were received by a very kind Dutch Commandant, who, to their joy and surprise, had Gertrude Linton with him. Tamar was especially pleased. She had taken a fancy to her, and seemed at once to become electrified and stimulated by her presence.

"I'm looking for a lost little child," she said, waving a paper. "The grandparents have been sent off to England without her, and are in despair. Here is her description. Let's see if we can find her by any chance. It's heartbreaking when the little ones get separated from their families. It does happen sometimes, and I can't sleep for thinking of them."

The refugees were herded together in a large dark room on the ground floor, waiting for dinner. It was a sorrowful thing to see all those homeless, stunned people, the men playing cards listlessly, the women drooping despairingly, the little children with no toys, the old, frail women so bewildered and weak that one wondered how they had survived the loss of their homes, and the horror of their experiences. Yet they brightened up amazingly when Gertrude Linton passed amongst them. She found the right word, the right greeting for every old woman, every tiny child; and Bramfield, too, appeared to have caught some of her magical gift — or perhaps to have had it all along, for all Tamar knew. The rest of the party, Tamar, the Representative and his wife, the Canadian journalist, and an American professor, followed humbly in the footsteps of these leaders, all anxious to show friendliness and sympathy. The old women were specially pleased to be spoken to, and one of them, in answer to Miss Linton's words of concern about the loss of her home and the trials she had been through, smiled with a radiance born of love, and said:

"Ah, but we have the little ones safe. Nothing matters except that."

And she pointed to a group of them playing near the stove. The Commandant looked in their direction, and turning to Tamar, who stood near him, exclaimed in a voice positively charged with grief:

"And imagine, Madame, we have no toys for the children — not a single one. Yes, one — this old, old rag that used to be a doll. That's not enough, is it?"

"No, it isn't enough," Tamar said, struck by the man's almost passionate earnestness.

"We shall send you toys tomorrow," the Representative's wife promised. "Toys and dolls from the Santa Claus ship. I'll see about them myself."

The Commandant's face lit up. She might have been promising him a kingdom. He was deeply concerned for the welfare of his charges. He told them how he was all the time trying to make improvements in the accommodation for the men and women upstairs, and arrange for separate married quarters, but that at present — well, all one could say was that this was at least better than the barges. And he held up his hands, as if in horror of the remembrance. The Canadian journalist, who alone of the party had seen the barges with their crowded human cargoes in the holds, without heat, without light, without air, said:

"Herr Commandant, this is a Paradise compared with the barges. I shall never think of them without a shudder. If one needed to know something of Belgium's first agony, the barges alone would have taught one."

"We have only just begun to be able to handle the problem of the refugees," the Commandant explained. "It has been overwhelming. Tens of thousands have swept like an avalanche over our borders. But we are beginning to surmount the difficulties. If you are going on to Bergen-op-Zoom, you will see a very different condition of things there."

"But never a Commandant who will care so much," they all thought.

His parting injunction was about the toys and dolls.

"Don't forget the toys and dolls to make the little children happy," he said.

They motored straight away to Bergen-op-Zoom, passing over the very road where the avalanche of refugees had, in their first horror, broken over the frontier on the day of the bombardment of Antwerp. For sixty hours the long procession of humanity crushed without a break from Antwerp to Rosendaal, and on the way many women went through the birth-agony, and some died by the roadside. The Canadian journalist, who had been present at Rosendaal, described the scene in a few graphic words, which touched the imagination of his hearers. They saw it with their mind's eye.

"A seething mass of people and possessions," he said, "old and young, strong and frail, the babe in arms, the child clinging to its mother's skirts, the old, blind woman led by a tiny boy, the lame limping on crutches and canes, with no one to carry their load of bundles — their only worldly goods. Women in remnants of luxury, girls with pet dogs under their arms, family groups huddled together, driven onwards in the hurrying human stream, pitiful possessions borne painfully along, bedding and pots and pans, and here and there a child's plaything too dear to leave behind, terror and despair and bewilderment on every face — and the goal of the fugitives anywhere, anywhere to be safe from German fury, German ruthlessness, German '*Kultur*.'"

At Bergen-op-Zoom the refugee quarters had become a city of tents, situate on high ground carefully chosen by the military authorities for this reason. The sight of the thousands of tents was very picturesque. Some of the tents were nicely kept, and were surrounded by some attempt at a sand garden. Most of them had a fire, and round this the family gathered gratefully,

thankful to have their own separate little establishment. The family refugee dog was conspicuous everywhere, keeping careful watch and barking at all intruders who dared to invade the privacy of the home. The tents were in general the abode of the better class, who chose them in preference to the barracks which were arranged in compartments for several families, all partitioned off from each other, and all steaming hot, close and stuffy. But the class of refugees who inhabited them, seemed to like this condition of life and would never have been persuaded to live in tents. These were called the second grade of refugee.

The third grade were housed chiefly by their own desire in one huge tent, like a large circus tent, with individual little households, it is true, but not screened off — a communal life, in fact. They had their own burgomaster. This tent presented a most curious and interesting sight, with many separate fires and lights and groups of people, and pathways arranged as if in a toy village on a large scale. The whole effect was exactly like a scene from a play. The people here looked happier than anywhere, and the children were playing about gaily. One even heard laughter.

The fourth grade were lodged in caravans, and consisted of the very low and criminal class; and these were screened off from the rest of the camp by barbed wire, and watched over by sentries. A school was in progress of being erected; and the Dutch Government was adding a church and a library for this settlement. Baths had already been built, and there was a medical department with a special depôt, where nursing mothers went to get an order for extra milk and white bread. The arrangements here were indeed a far cry from the

desolate Rosendaal granary, and were a sure sign to the visitors of the fine purpose and goodwill of the generous Dutch, and of their determination to handle their most difficult refugee problem with all possible means, both practical and benevolent, in their power.

The Commandant said that the tragedy of the present situation was the unemployment existing among the exiles, which would inevitably lead to rapid demoralization if not dealt with. He pointed to the groups of men sitting around, either playing cards or doing nothing; and indeed it was a pitiful sight to see able-bodied people, industrious by nature, with no duties to perform and no claims to which they had to answer.

"We shall start work-rooms as soon as we are able," he said. "At the moment, though, all we can do is to house and feed them."

Gertrude Linton whispered to Tamar:

"I should like to start a work-room for the women. What do you say to wool carpets and rugs? I shall buy up all the wool I can whilst it's cheap, and get the Friends who are helping the Dutch to suggest this industry to the authorities when the time comes."

The Commandant was then called away; but he left the party in charge of a young officer, and told him to help Miss Linton in her search for the missing young girl, Marie Louise Gérardin, Ruelle Josephine, Malines. He did not think there was any young girl amongst the people who had lost their memory and did not know where they came from. They were older women and a few men. Still, she had better look round and then she would be satisfied.

He seemed to part from them all with regret, and invited them to visit him again and see the improvements

which he hoped to make. The young officer took the piece of paper and read the description of Marie Louise Gérardin aloud:

"*Marie Louise Gérardin, age about fifteen, slight of build, with blue eyes, long eyelashes, fair, beautiful and of a merry disposition.*"

They wandered with him amongst the refugees, keeping their eyes open for any one who answered to that description; and Miss Linton made inquiries of some of the families in a language which the Representative's wife called her "patent patois," and which was an amazing mixture of Dutch, German, Flemish and Gertrude Linton. But it evidently "did the trick," and that was the main point! Every one seemed to understand her, but no one could give her any information about the missing girl. Then the officer took them to a tent where two or three of the refugees who had lost their memory were sitting huddled together, known by no one, claimed by no one, dazed, forlorn, despairing. But, as the Commandant had said, there was no young girl amongst them. They were pathetic figures, haunting remembrances. And the visitors turned away with heavy hearts.

"There are still one or two railway sheds at Flushing full of refugees who have not yet been drafted off to the settlements, and also two or three barges," the officer told them. "It would be worth while to look there. But we'll do our best to search this camp thoroughly. It will probably be my duty, and I will carry it out most willingly, I promise you."

He conducted them finally to their cars, talking to them in the same admirable English as the Commandant's and evidently as pleased as his superior officer to

have the chance of airing his ability. They were all impressed with the kindness and the pitifulness of the officers. The tragic fate of Belgium seemed to have touched them very deeply, probably all the more so because they realized that only a bare chance had saved their own country from a similar misfortune.

The experiences of the party were by no means over yet. They tried to get lunch at a hotel at Bergen-op-Zoom, but were rudely refused by the proprietor, who was either a German or a pro-German. At the second hotel they had better luck, and had, moreover, the interest of meeting two Belgian ladies who had on the previous evening escaped over the frontier in the cart of a peasant, to whom they gave a large sum of money for hiding them amongst his sacks of vegetables. But he and they had run the risk of being shot, the fate of scores upon scores of fugitives. One of these ladies had a villa, where she had nursed many of the English soldiers. She spoke with much feeling of their chivalry and their gratitude.

When Bramfield heard that they were making for England, he at once offered to take care of them and carry out the arrangements for their passage. The Representative and his wife pressed them to motor back with them to Rotterdam, and wait there rather than at a place so near the frontier as Bergen-op-Zoom. They accepted eagerly, but broke down suddenly and wept at finding friends thus unexpectedly raised up for them. They were both scared and unnerved by the dangers through which they had passed and the awful sights they had seen. But the older lady looked half dead with fright, and yet was in a state of great agitation which her friend tried to control. Very charming and touch-

ing was the way in which they expressed their gratitude to each member of the little company.

"Nothing to thank for," said the Representative in marvellously abominable French which cheered every one, including the two fugitives. "The war makes comrades of us all at a moment's notice. That is as it should be."

"We have money for our passage to England," the older lady said, suddenly clutching at her bodice and in her excitement tearing out a small bag which fell on the table. The string broke, and very beautiful jewels were strewn about — many gorgeous rings and earrings and brooches, and amongst them a costly pearl ring.

A low cry escaped Tamar. The unexpected vision excited her almost beyond her control. She forgot everything on earth except that there, on the other side of the table, lay some most attractive precious stones in settings of finest workmanship. In another moment, she would undoubtedly have clutched hold of them, but that an irresistible prompting impelled her to look in Bramfield's direction. He was staring at her with horror on his face. He had turned deadly pale. He fixed her with his eyes. He paralysed her. He saved her. Tamar sat motionless, ashamed — the temptation over. No one except he and she knew of this drama of briefest duration, but of burning intensity.

"Ah, plenty of money there," said the Representative with a laugh. "But hide them all away quickly. See here, shove them in my wife's satchel, and stick it in your corsage. That's right. Good God! you might have been murdered for them by the very people who effected your escape. It makes one shudder to think of it. And now let's be off."

They returned by the same route, over the same road traversed by those thousands of refugees in their measureless misery — a trail made sacred by human suffering. They were all silent, tired out and haunted and held by memories of what they had seen that day. The car containing the Representative and his wife, the two Belgian ladies and Bramfield, had preceded the second one in which the remainder of the party travelled to Rotterdam. The second car arrived about fifteen minutes later. Bramfield was waiting at the entrance of their hotel. He stood with head uncovered.

"Friends," he said in a low voice, "I have something dreadful to tell you. We found one of the Belgian ladies had died in the car. We thought she was sleeping only. It was the lady with the jewels."

Alone in her room that night, Tamar sat watching the lights in the harbours. Sleep would not come to her. Shame would not leave her.

A cry was wrung from her very soul.

"Woe is me, woe is me that I am what I am," she murmured.

CHAPTER VIII

IT is difficult to know what they would all have done without the gracious presence of the Representative's wife and the exhilarating influence of Gertrude Linton on the following day. The tragedy of the Belgian lady's death culminating on all the heartrending scenes they had witnessed, took an immense effect on every one of them. Miss Linton was longing to renew her search for Marie Louise, but instead, she set on foot a wool campaign, and demanded that every one should help her by sallying forth separately and buying as much wool as could be secured whilst the price was still low. She said the carpet and rug scheme had got on her brain, and she would not rest until she had carried it out. No one was let off; and the friendly rivalry thus established certainly raised the spirits of the community. And the Representative's wife reminded them that they had promised to pack and send off toys and dolls to the Rosendaal children, and must not fail to keep their word. So she requisitioned the little steam launch flying the American flag, and commandeered their services for the work; and they spent a busy morning at the wharf. They came back looking different people after their healing task of ministering to the toyless little children whom the Commandant loved. Tamar, whose grim sadness of heart no one guessed, was secretly comforted too. For, as the Canadian journalist said, the most hardened person in the world, having seen the sad scenes at Rosendaal and elsewhere,

could not fail to consider himself fortunate indeed to have the chance of bringing a smile to the face of even one little one. Tamar could not have put that thought into words, but it was borne to her subconsciously, whilst to the Representative's wife it came with a deep and tender realization.

In the afternoon it was arranged that they were all to meet for tea at the offices of the Commission, in an old and spacious house in the Haringvliet, where at one time the herring fleet used to land. Here they found one or two deputies from Namur, Lierre and Liége, some members of the Belgian Comité de Secours and also of the Dutch Committee, and the Dutch Shipping Agent who had looked in to bring the good news of a wireless at the Lizard from a relief ship well on its way. There were also the American military attaché at The Hague, a Belgian artist, who was going back to Malines to try and rescue his pictures and was never heard of again, and another Rhodes scholar attached to the Commission, who had been stationed at one of the depôts in Belgium to receive the barges and check the cargoes as they passed through that particular outpost on their way to their several destinations. There was also an English authoress who was engaged in writing an appeal for funds for the Commission, and who was sitting at table looking fairly distraught, and surrounded by weekly lists of cargoes arranged, cargoes dispatched, cargoes arrived, photographs of vessels, letters of appeal for help from the Burgomasters and priests of the starving communes, and whole portfolios of reports and documeuts, including copies of the German undertaking that the Relief food should not be requisitioned.

"Such a mass of material, I don't know where to

turn," she said to Tamar, who was standing by her, looking at the photographs.

"Go down and see one of the vessels first," Tamar suggested. "That will help you more than anything. Even I felt I could write an appeal when I saw those cargoes of mercy."

"Cargoes of mercy!" exclaimed the authoress. "You've given me the title, and given me the idea. I'll take your advice and then I shall be able to go ahead."

Tamar looked pleased.

"Well, I've always understood that statistics killed imagination," she said.

Bramfield was pleased. He was always tenderly glad when Tamar scored a point.

"Why, Tamar," he said with a smile, "it appears there's no end to your resources. You found out something valuable about a spy's appearance, and now you invent a good title — a remarkable performance that."

"And she ferreted out the largest quantity of wool this morning at an unheard-of bargain," said Gertrude Linton, laughing. "A very clever confederate, isn't she, Mr. Bramfield?"

"Yes, especially about bargains," he answered with a twinkle in his eye. "I'd back her there against any one in the world — except perhaps a certain old Weduwe, near Alkmaar, eh, T. Scott?"

"That remains to be proved, Bramfield," she answered, a slight smile passing over her face.

They walked back to the hotel together. Neither of them had made the slightest allusion to the silent battle which had taken place between them at Bergen-op-Zoom. Yet Tamar was longing to confess her shame

and to thank him for the cheek he had put on her. But pride forbade her. And chivalry restrained Bramfield from showing any sign of sympathy with her shame and suffering. For he knew that she had suffered. He knew well that set, stubborn look on her face, that strain in her eyes, and a curious, almost imperceptible, shrinking together of her shoulders as though she were hiding something in her breast. He longed to say one word to comfort her, but could not, dared not. So in tense silence they passed over the bridge amidst a forest of masts and alongside the quay, until they nearly reached their hotel. And then suddenly he was able to find words to convey comfort, indirectly, surreptitiously, and yet definitely.

"Tamar," he said, "you won't mind delaying our departure for a day or two? There are things to be seen to about that poor lady's affairs, and of course there is the funeral which her friend will attend. And as we could not dream of letting her go to England alone in her distress, we must remain for a while. I reckon on your help in this sad business. You will help me to look after her, won't you?"

Tamar did not answer at the time, could not answer. If she could have framed a reply at all, she would have said: "Bramfield, I know, and I understand and I thank you." But what she did say, when at last she found utterance, was:

"I will do what I can, Bramfield."

He nodded. She added:

"I have promised to go with Miss Linton on her search for that missing girl."

"You like Gertrude Linton?" he said. "I thought you would."

"Yes, I like her," she answered—"and I envy her. She at least would never clutch at jewels."

"Hush, hush, my dear friend," he said gently. "You must let that pain pass. You must indeed."

But even in the darkness of the night he knew that she shook her head.

She went with Gertrude Linton on the search for Marie Louise the next day. They began by visiting the one remaining barge in Rotterdam, where there were still a few refugees, and then a large building, a sort of hotel for emigrants, which was now being used to house a few hundred of the fugitives. They found no one to answer to Marie Louise's name or description; nor did any of the clues they had to her identity and surroundings encourage them to believe that they would run her to earth anywhere. Her name was Marie Louise Gérardin, her age about fifteen; she was said to be fair, slight of build, with blue eyes, long eyelashed, merry by disposition; her address was 8, Ruelle Josephine, Malines; her sister's name was Amarice, aged six years, and very dear to her, and this little one was safe in England with the grandparents who were living in Dulwich, in the house of one of Miss Linton's cousins. It was from them that she had received these few details, together with a letter begging her to try and find the elder girl. Her grandparents were fretting their hearts away, and, ran the letter, "We hear the old lady crying in the night: '*Marie — Marie, chère petite Marie.*' It is not to be stood. Try all you can to find her." There was one other little detail added, which seemed insignificant enough. The little sister was crying always for her faithful playmate, Fido, an old

brown dog, good-hearted and long-suffering, the true friend of the family.

This information was scant enough, in all truth; but Gertrude Linton was blessed with a temperament which could never be easily daunted. She was always ready to start off in a fresh direction on the slightest encouragement, and on the barest chance of success. Tamar, entirely unaccustomed to exhibitions of such spontaneousness and indifference to fatigue or discomfort or distance, considered her companion to be hopelessly mad. But she did not attempt to dishearten her. She merely wondered in an amused, amazed sort of way, what they were going to do next, and even laughed when Miss Linton said gaily:

"Well, that was a distinct failure. But never mind. Perhaps our next venture will be a success."

Their next venture proved also to be a failure. They went to a little village not far from Rosendaal, where, so they learnt from the Dutch Committee, there was a Belgian woman from Aerschot, whose husband had been shot by the Germans on the day when they entered that peaceful village. She had flown with her children, and on her way had found and protected a young girl claimed by no one. Perhaps this child was Marie Louise. After a dreary walk along a desolate side canal, they came to the house and knocked at the door. A woman, after some delay, opened it. She was weeping bitterly. She told them her little baby had died. She had just folded its little hands, and lighted the candle. "Mesdames would like to come up and see the little one?" she said.

They went into the tiny room, almost a cupboard, made sacred and stately by the presence of death.

The little dead face wore an expression of grave, sad wisdom, which had soared and bade others soar beyond the happenings of this life.

Then the mother led them away to the kitchen where the other children were sitting, frightened and quelled as children often are by death. But in a moment Gertrude Linton had them round her, and little tongues began to talk and little hands to make free with her satchel. And the Belgian said through her tears:

"It is good that Madame has come to cheer them. Madame has the right way with children."

But she had no stranger amongst her flock; and so once again the journey had been in vain as far as Marie Louise was concerned. Still Miss Linton would not give up the search; and she and Tamar went off to Flushing, where they visited two railway sheds full of refugees — the most awful places they had yet seen. They were almost thankful not to have found Marie Louise in those vile surroundings. Then they looked for her in two barges, always in vain; and having, as they believed, come to the end of all their chances, were prepared to relax their efforts, when some one told them that there was yet another barge a little farther down, past the railway sheds. One of the head officials, who knew Miss Linton well, conducted them to the spot, helped them to clamber over the side of the wharf on to another barge, and thence on to the last remaining barge, said to contain a few refugees who had not been "collected."

"There were a few yesterday," he said. "But they may have been cleared off by now. The authorities are sending them off as soon as possible to better quarters, but it takes time, with so many thousands to see after."

They stumbled down the ladder which led to the hold, and had nearly reached the bottom step when their guide said:

"I believe this was where they left the poor little creature who had gone mad. Perhaps I'd better go first and make sure that it is all right. I'd forgotten that."

But they did not heed him, and landed in the hold, which was in darkness save for the light shed by a small kerosene lamp on a stool. They could see about four or five people, three men and two women, huddled round it. These looked up, but made no sign of greeting to the visitors. The sound of a low moaning was heard at the further end. Their guide raised the lamp and directed it on the figure of a young, frail girl, swaying to and fro on a broken chair, a piteous object, a deplorable wreck of youth and loveliness.

Gertrude Linton bent over her.

"Marie Louise," she said. "Marie Louise Gérardin."

There was no sign of intelligence. The girl continued to moan and to rock herself backwards and forwards. Miss Linton tried her with the name of the town and the street where Marie Louise had lived. She tried her with the words *grand'mère, grandpère.* All in vain. She tried her with the name of Marie's little sister, Amarice. Was there an almost imperceptible pause in the moaning, a faint trace of interest on that blank countenance? They held their breath in suspense. The moaning continued. The flicker went out.

"Fair, young, beautiful, with blue eyes, long eyelashes, merry," said the description.

Could she once have answered to it? How were they

to know? They looked at each other as if searching for counsel, torn with pity, distressed with doubt.

Suddenly an inspiration came to Tamar.

"You have tried everything," she said in a whisper. "But wasn't there something about a dog?"

"Yes, yes, of course there was," Gertrude Linton exclaimed. "Fido, the dog, the old brown dog whom the sister was always crying for. I'll try her with that."

And she walked a few steps away, and then began calling:

"Fido, Fido, Fido, come here."

There was no sign.

Again she called:

"Fido, Fido."

The anxious watchers in that dark, cold, desolate hold saw a slight quiver pass over the girl's face. She ceased her piteous moaning, ceased the restless rocking to and fro. She seemed as if she were going to rise, but could not.

And again Miss Linton called:

"Fido, Fido, come here, naughty little dog. Amarice wants you, Fido, Fido."

The girl sprang up.

"Fido, Fido," she cried. "Amarice wants you."

She burst into passionate tears.

The search was over.

CHAPTER IX

IT was characteristic of Gertrude Linton that, once having found Marie Louise, she did not lose sight of her for a moment. Rather than leave her at the Friends' Refuge Hostel in Flushing, where she would have been tenderly cared for, she took her back to Rotterdam for a few days whilst she finished up some business there. She feared that if the girl were separated from her, she might at once relapse into the condition of entire mental blankness in which Tamar and she had found her; and, even as it was, Marie Louise's improvement was but slight, fluctuating, and the reverse of reassuring. But this did not daunt Miss Linton. The great point to her was that this child probably was Marie Louise, that she must be handed over to the grandparents for identification, and that if she did not belong to them, then —

"Then what?" asked T. Scott.

"Oh, then I must adopt her myself!" Miss Linton said with a laugh. "That's simple enough. Some one has got to look after her. Perhaps you would like to?"

Tamar laughed a soft, low laugh. The idea of her adopting any one amused her immensely.

"I should like to see myself adopting any one," she said with a grim smile. "You see, I'm — well — I don't mind telling you — I'm mean. I part with my money with difficulty."

"Oh, I daresay that is only a habit," Miss Linton

said gaily. "And the war is changing all our habits. You will probably change too, and want to adopt numberless refugee children."

Tamar certainly had now far more chance of changing than if she had remained shut up in her shop in Dean Street, centred on her own affairs, and affected by the war only in as much as it had given her the opportunity of buying beautiful bits of jewellery cheaply and selling others at a specially handsome profit. Her intercourse with the Thorntons, the result of her visit to Lallington, had opened her eyes to some new aspects of life, which had arrested her attention more even than she knew; but in Holland some of the tragic consequences of the war had literally been hurled at her mind. The impact wrought in her a mighty awakening to outside influences of many kinds.

She was learning, too, something about people from a standpoint different from that of a business relationship. The men and women to whom Bramfield had introduced her amazed her. He himself perhaps amazed her as much as any one of them; for she had either been blind to his best qualities, or else unable to put a right value on what he was, what he stood for. His disinterestedness dumbfounded her. Indeed, the disinterestedness of them all was a revelation to her. If she was taking no other lesson back from Holland, she was at least taking that.

Her traditions from her mother, her own natural disposition, her method of life, the trend of her thoughts were entirely alien to it. But it haunted her. She turned it over in her mind and contemplated it with the same intensity with which she would have stared at a precious stone which puzzled, defeated her. She exam-

ined it, weighed it, applied all the tests she knew, and finally had to acknowledge that she could make nothing of it. But she recognized it as something beautiful, though baffling, disturbing. Another characteristic of these people which interested her greatly was the spontaneousness of their helpfulness. The need being there, the deed was there. No questionings, no doubts, no delays, no half-heartedness, but instant rising up, instant coping with and overcoming every kind of difficulty and obstruction.

She was borne along in the stream, unconscious of the processes at work in her spirit, though increasingly conscious of the new influences to which she was all the time being exposed. She began to understand how impossible it was for any one to be on the scene and not become part and parcel of this beneficent machinery of effort on behalf of the hapless victims of the war. She began to realize how Bramfield, for instance, coming over originally for business purposes, no doubt, had become caught in up to the hilt: how one small deed of helpfulness led to another by natural consequence, even as sunset follows on sunrise: and how of necessity a camaraderie sprang up amongst the workers born of common obstacles, common aims, common devotion and enthusiasm. She even understood how all their separate jobs were interwoven with each other so as to form a harmonious whole.

Even if she had wished it, she could not have dissociated herself from their doings. She did not wish it. She had promised Bramfield to help with the Belgian lady, and she returned gladly with Gertrude Linton to Rotterdam who expected her to take her share in looking after Marie Louise.

"You'll of course stand by, won't you?" she said. "You'll give her a watchful eye whilst I'm running about on my various duties?"

"Yes," Tamar answered.

She was proud that she had been allotted definite tasks which she was expected as a matter of course to perform. She rather wondered how many more people she would be required to look after, but she was ready for all demands. She was tired of having it taken for granted by Bramfield that she could not be interested in anything except her own affairs. So that when he, too, claimed a service from her, as well as forgave her for the ugliness he had checked in her, some tiny frond of gracious willingness in her nature began to unfold itself and struggle to the light.

She watched over the bereaved Belgian lady, and would scarcely allow herself to be relieved by the Representative's wife, always kind and considerate for those around her. And she watched over little Marie Louise. Miss Linton was very busy helping the Society of Friends to initiate their campaign of reconstruction amongst the Belgians, and working with the English authorities at Flushing in arrangements for the shipping of the refugees to England. And so it came about that it was Tamar who saw most of the child. It was Tamar who tried to capture and hold her fitful mind, Tamar who bought clothes for her, Tamar who found some bit of finery for her which coaxed a gleam of pleasure into the distressed little face. It was only momentary, but it was enough to encourage the belief that Marie Louise was finding her way, slowly and painfully perhaps, yet groping near the lost trail.

Once Tamar said to Bramfield:

"Now, if only I had a little jewel out of one of my trays, I might give it to her."

He stared at her. She was amazing him by some of the things she said and did now. Yet she was, after all, only one of the many whom the war was releasing from prison. In all directions citadels were being assailed, and rays of light directed into the darkened recesses of selfishness. The shop in Dean Street was but typical of thousands of homes barricaded either in peace or war time against all outside interests and influences, except in so far as they would be likely to contribute to the well-being and wealth of the people inside those strongly-defended walls of partition. The war would break them down, slowly perhaps, but one by one. Once broken down, they would never be built up again. T. Scott's citadel had at least the chance of falling sooner than most people's, because tragic facts were being brought home to her in a way denied to others who, safe and comfortable and sheltered in England, had no opportunity of realizing at first hand the suffering of a nation in agony.

The Belgian lady was laid to rest in Rotterdam, and a few days afterwards her friend, together with Bramfield, Tamar, Marie Louise and Miss Linton, left for Flushing.

Captain Smith, who had been away some time, returned the night before they left, and was amongst the party who saw them off at the station. He had taken a great liking for Tamar, and wanted her to come out to Nova Scotia. Tamar laughingly said she would certainly come.

"If I want a convoy," the Captain said, "I'll send a wireless to The Lizard."

Bramfield looked rather cross. He was not at all pleased that any one else should even try to have an innings with Tamar.

She parted from them all with a real regret. None of them, neither the Skipper, nor the official messenger, nor the Rhodes scholar, nor the Canadian journalist, nor the Representative's wife, nor the Representative, nor the Belgian *délégué*, nor any of that gracious company, would ever know what they had done for her, what they had been to her. They would pass on their way and never know.

Bramfield was not in the best of tempers when they arrived late at Flushing, and found that the Consul had gone home and that they could not have their passports viséd. The steamer did not start till early the next morning, but all passengers had to go on board overnight. It was maddening to know the boat was at hand and yet have to miss her. Bramfield, who had by now worked himself into a great rage, determined to dash off in a taxi to the Consul's house, and, if possible, bring him back to his duties. Confound the wretched man, why wasn't he at his post? Consuls oughtn't to want any rest, any food, any leisure, any sleep in war time or at any time.

Every one tried in vain to calm him and reason with him. But as he had made up his mind to run his man to earth, and a taxi-cab had been produced after great trouble, Tamar thought she had better go with him and prevent him from attacking the chauffeur or any one else he might come across on his way to his victim.

It was half an hour's run out to the Consul's private house, and during that time Bramfield never ceased to storm and rage. When they arrived there, they knocked and rang, and rang and knocked, without any results except noise. He seemed beside himself with temper. Not a sound, not a sign vouchsafed the house.

Tamar became vastly amused.

"You're making a complete fool of yourself, Bramfield," she said calmly. "Until now I've believed you to be a sensible man. I'd almost decided to make you my executor. I certainly shall not now. Come away. Probably the Consul is not here at all. And if he is, he's evidently not intending to answer our summons. And look — there's a man watching us all the time — and no wonder. You'll be taken in charge as a madman if you are not careful."

"Only a Secret Service man," Bramfield said, cooling down a little. "Probably following you, Tamar. Probably British, too. Probably suspecting you of trading with the enemy. I warned you, you know. One more try — and then I'll give the game up."

"Come back and be sensible," she urged.

And at last she got him away and caged him safely in the taxi-cab.

"I never knew you were such an entire fool, Bramfield," she said. "But I've learnt many things about you lately."

"Have you?" he said, quieting down and lighting a cigarette. "Good things, Tamar? Good enough to make you love me, for instance?"

"Well, scarcely, after all this violent behaviour," she answered with a laugh. "But good enough to . . ."

She hesitated.

"Go on," he said. "Tell me the worst — or the best."

"Good enough to make me wish to be — respected by you — not despised by you, Bramfield," she said.

"*Despise you*," he fairly cried, snatching her hand. "Why, such a thing is not possible."

"But you saw me clutch at the jewels," she said, with an intensity half of anger, half of pleading.

"Clutch at all the jewels you like in all places and at all seasons, and I could never despise you," he answered. "Never."

"But you would try to stop me," she said slowly.

"I would try to stop you because I love you," he said. "Love doesn't despise. Love understands — and wants to help."

Tamar made no answer. She did not withdraw her hand. It was he who withdrew his. He remained silent, thinking of her words, which gave him a new hope and of which he would have scorned to take an unfair advantage.

When he spoke again, it was about that uninvited person, the Secret Service man, sitting comfortably in front with the chauffeur, about consuls — confound them — and this one in particular, and about that wretched Canadian skipper. Oh, yes, a fine fellow and no mistake. But what the dickens did he mean by inviting her to go to Nova Scotia? It was absurd. And a liberty — a great liberty.

"And what would you do there, I should like to know?" he asked defiantly. "Why, there would be no bargains for you to make. You'd droop. You'd die."

"Well, you needn't work yourself up into another

rage as silly as the last," she said quaintly. "I've not gone yet, have I?"

"No, and you won't if I can help it," he answered.

Tamar laughed. Bramfield was jealous, and she was rather pleased. She was as sorry as he when the car drew up at the hotel, and the escapade was over.

Gertrude Linton, who received them, told them she had learnt that the Consul had been up day and night for weeks past, and had had to seek safety in flight, in order to secure a little continuous sleep; and so it was not to be wondered at that they had failed to bring the poor man back.

"We've missed the boat, and must make the best of it," she said. "This hotel is pro-German, and the concierge, who has been exceedingly unfriendly, has refused to help us to get anything to eat. But the German chambermaid has been a brick, and has managed to annex rolls and butter from the dining-room which is shut up. We can turn into the smoking-room and have a bite there."

Gretchen, the German chambermaid, looked in upon them, friendly in manner and smiling of countenance.

"Ach! I take no notice of the war," she said. "I have no patience with the silly nations flying at each other's throats in this silly fashion. Ja! I can get you some more butter if you want it. Ach, I was very happy when I was in England. Two, three years I was there in a very kind English family. I am thinking of them now when I am doing this little service for you all. And my Fritz is shut up in that Alexandra Palace. Ja, he was hairdresser. A good, nice boy. Ach, ach, what a world! It seems we are all gone mad. And the poor little Belgian girl upstairs. Ach, ach, what a sadness!

But she's asleep now. I looked into the room. Ach, mein Gott, and Madame weeping in the other room. I have to weep, too."

"Probably a spy," Bramfield said when she was gone. "Now be careful, Tamar. Don't give away any State secrets."

But Gertrude Linton would not hear of Gretchen being a spy.

"Any one and every one, but not Gretchen," she said staunchly.

But whatever Gretchen was, she had got the whole thing in a nutshell. The world had gone mad. And this was only the beginning of the madness.

The next day they saw more refugees in another railway shed, and visited a few others who, having a little money of their own, were quartered in some of the poor houses in Flushing, waiting until their passage to England could be arranged for. Then, to recover from the scenes of misery and suffering, they accepted the invitation of a Dutch naval officer, a friend of Bramfield's, to inspect the submarine of which he was Commander. He took them one by one into his magician's chamber and tried to explain to their lay minds some of the mechanism, diabolical, thrilling, marvellous.

This ended their experiences in Holland, but they had many excitements on their journey home to England. There were six or seven French escaped prisoners from Germany on board, with whom Bramfield and Miss Linton had a talk on the quiet; for it was a Dutch boat, and the men might have had to be interned if the Captain had chosen officially to recognize their presence. But he did not. Sympathy with them, therefore, and active

help for them in the way of contributions of money and cigarettes had to be proffered in a wise secrecy. There was a man on board known by the Secret Service to be a German spy, who had hitherto eluded all the people on the look-out for him; and he was going to be seized the moment he set foot on English soil. And there was a very handsome woman of the prima donna type, the German wife of an Englishman interned in Ruhleben, but suspected of being in sympathy with the enemy and a traitor. She, being a British subject, was allowed to proceed, but was being closely watched and followed. To crown all, the man with the false hand was on board. He was disguised. Tamar's attention was drawn to him by a curious tie-pin he wore. It was an alexandrite cat's-eye and a beautiful specimen, too, of that rare stone. She stared at it, stared at him, and once again observed the stiff arm, the hand of which was thrust into his coat pocket. He had travelled first class, but disappeared before the end of the journey. Bramfield, to whom Tamar confided her discovery, found him stowed away in the second class. He would not be landing, of course, but would be trying to get into communication with some confederate in port.

"He'll be dished sooner or later," Bramfield said. "We're not so silly as we appear. Do you remember what the Representative said about our Secret Service? He said he couldn't slice an orange without our Secret Service knowing of it. I must say it has been a comfort to me to hear that."

"Well, let's hope we do something as well as know something," Tamar said grimly.

"Why, Tamar, you're becoming quite patriotic," he said. "You'll be enlisting soon."

She laughed a soft little laugh. More and more did she like it when Bramfield teased her.

They landed, and after many preliminaries and much waiting, finally got free from the authorities and proceeded on their way. But now an unforeseen difficulty arose. Bramfield had arranged to take the Belgian lady, who had borne the journey very well, to her friends in Ealing, and Gertrude Linton intended to deposit Marie Louise at her cousin's house and then acquaint grandpère and grand'mère Gérardin that some one had been found who might possibly, indeed very probably, prove to be their grand-daughter, but that owing to her mental condition and the loss of her memory and her pitiful appearance, no stranger could be sure of her identity. So the kindest plan was to explain the position before they saw her, and thus fortify them against what might prove to be a bitter disappointment.

But when it came to parting with Tamar, Marie Louise clung to her with might and main, and showed every sign of developing all her worst symptoms, from the early severity of which she had been somewhat weaned. Nothing would make her budge from T. Scott's side. This was entirely a new experience to Tamar. Never before had any one dared or cared to take possession of her in this way. She looked at Marie Louise and looked at Gertrude Linton, said nothing, felt a bit sheepish, embarrassed, doubtful. Miss Linton settled things in her own patent fashion.

"Oh, well, T. Scott," she said gaily, "we must come and sleep at your house. There's nothing else to be done."

"Sleep at my house," Tamar repeated, aghast. "Why, no one has ever done that."

"Well, it's about time they did," answered Miss Linton, nothing daunted. "Any old shakedown will do. I suppose you have a chair or two, haven't you? And a rug or two? What more do we want? Cheer up! It's your own fault, you know. You ought not to have been so good to the girl. Clearly you will have to be the one to adopt her if she doesn't belong to these people! Or we'll share her together. Come along; we can't stand here hesitating. Marie Louise will make a scene. We can buy food on our way. The great point is to get a roof over our heads, side by side with you."

Marie Louise and Miss Linton gained the day, but Tamar's face was a study in bewilderment mingled with increasing pleasure, decreasing sullenness, new-born tenderness.

It would have needed a harder heart than Tamar's not to have responded to the human appeal of the little forlorn refugee who clung so tightly to her skirt as if in terror of being torn asunder from a protecting presence on which she had learnt to lean.

So they headed for Dean Street.

CHAPTER X

MRS. BRIDGES, the old char, received them. She had been warned by a telegram, the receipt of which amazed her exceedingly. Never before had she had a telegram from Tamar. Extravagance begets extravagance, and she allowed herself the recklessness of lighting a fire in the inner room, and took the risk of being scolded roundly. But to her astonishment T. Scott made no complaint. On the contrary, she seemed pleased. She drew a chair to the fender, placed Marie Louise in it, knelt down by her side and warmed the child's hands.

"So this is your home, T. Scott," Miss Linton said, warming her own hands and glancing round with interest at the old china and the antiques.

"This is my home," Tamar said.

"Well I, for one, am glad to be going to spend the night amongst such beautiful things," Gertrude Linton said. "We can put Marie Louise on that Jacobean couch, can't we? And I can sleep in the Jacobean arm-chair. I suppose they *are* Jacobean?"

Tamar nodded, and Miss Linton added:

"So you see we sha'n't really be disturbing you so much, after all. You don't regret taking us in?"

"I have never had visitors before," Tamar answered, a little surlily.

Miss Linton laughed. She was beginning to know some of Tamar's characteristics. They did not alarm

her in the least. She believed, and rightly, that they were negotiable.

"Don't be frightened by visitors," she said. "Visitors are only formidable if they are allowed to be so."

"Visitors," chuckled the old char to herself, as she went to the kitchen with the coffee and rolls and butter which they had brought in. "No, she's never had no visitors before to sleep here, and not many to take so much as a bite since I've been coming these last fifteen years. And won't she just grudge them the food! I know her, I do."

She was still chortling, when Tamar came into the kitchen with another small parcel which she opened and displayed to the astonished old woman as ham cut in slices.

"Why," she said, "you're fair ruining yourself. That's what you're doing. Perhaps I oughtn't to have lit the fire. But I did say to myself if you was angry I'd give you the bundle of wood myself and the coals too."

A smile passed over Tamar's face. She and the old woman understood each other.

"Make haste with the coffee," she urged. "And you can do some toast. I'm quite willing to accept the bundle of wood and the coals if you want me to. I have a little present for you somewhere, a small bottle of Dutch gin. Schiedam, they call it."

"I don't mind what they call it as long as I get it," the old woman said. "A present for me. Well, I never. Times is changed. I don't know where I am."

"Nor do I," said Tamar, with a good-tempered little laugh. "But you are right. Times have changed —

and we've got to change with them. At least, it appears so. I'm not sure I like it."

"It seems to suit you," the old woman remarked, as she set about preparing the coffee. "You look as though you'd been enjoying yourself for once. A good thing to get away from them jewels and all the rubbish here."

"I am glad to get home," Tamar said. "But I did not expect to bring people back with me. But the little Belgian refugee wouldn't be parted from me."

The old woman looked up from the coffee pot.

"Wouldn't be parted from you?" she repeated, with a puzzled grin on her face.

"No," said Tamar, with a slight tone of triumph in her voice. "You think that strange, don't you?"

The old woman did not trust herself to speak. She just nodded.

"I think it strange, too," Tamar said. "But, you see, we rescued her from a dreadful place. It makes me shudder when I think of that barge where we found her. When I think of it, I don't mind having brought her here — in fact, I begin to be glad — in a sort of way. I shall put her in my bed tonight. I'll bring the blankets down, and as there is a fire, we can air them well."

The old woman stood staring after her.

"I'm fair dazed," she murmured. "Times *is* changed. Not angry about the fire. Bread, butter, ham and coffee for them all. The young girl sleeping in her bed. Didn't forget the old woman. Brought a present for her. What did she call it? Some outlandish name. But I don't mind what they call it as long as I get it. A present for me."

So Marie Louise, tucked up in warm blankets, went to sleep in Tamar's bed, with her hand clasping tightly Tamar's hand. Gertrude Linton chose the Jacobean couch in the inner room, to which she appeared to have taken a fancy, and Tamar, with a secret reluctance, conceded it to her. For no one except herself had rested on it since the day, long ago now, yet ever borne in remembrance, when the only man she had loved, had sought there a merciful repose at a moment of overwhelming mental anxiety and intense bodily fatigue. She had watched by his side throughout the night in the same chair in which she was now keeping vigil; for when she found that she could not sleep on the sofa in her room, she had thrown on her dressing-gown, bent over Marie Louise to make sure the child was soundly asleep and not likely to wake and miss her, and then crept down to the inner room, where Miss Linton, entirely hidden under a mountain of rugs and cloaks, was dead to the world, oblivious of wars and refugees, barges, internment camps, escaped French prisoners, spies, Germans, Belgians, British Governments, American Relief Commissions, cargoes of mercy, Dutch Committees, and officials of every grade, and reconstruction schemes of every variety. Tomorrow she would be alive and keen again, with that magic vitality and that amazing disinterestedness which was an abiding wonder to T. Scott. But meantime she was just that mountain of rugs, nothing less, nothing more. No need to keep vigil over her.

But even in this condition she was a link with all the astonishing things Tamar had seen, with all the experiences crowded into those three weeks; and it was with these happenings shared with her and with those other

comrades left behind and with Bramfield as she now knew him, that Tamar's thoughts kept vigil. No, not with the dead, not with the past, but with the present, with the overwhelming present which had thrust itself upon her with a force she could not resist. Never could she forgot what she had seen, heard, learnt. The world at war. The world caught up in a network of tragedy. An upheaval of life. Devastation and agony — and this only the beginning of the story. That was what all those people over there said constantly — the beginning. It would go on, it would go on, it would go on, so they said; and the sights and scenes they had been witnessing there would prove to be mere incidents — an ushering in of larger and even more tragic consequences.

And this was the knowledge she had brought back from her quest for Dutch nefs. Rather laughable, wasn't it? Yes, she had gone for Dutch nefs, and she'd got them — and not only them, but all this disturbing, disintegrating knowledge, and a disquieting foreboding that the inner room and the outer shop were going to lose their hold on her. That was ridiculous, of course. She had never felt like that before. It was only because she had been out of touch with the things most dear to her. Three weeks — and she had not handled a single precious stone, except that emerald in the crow's-nest of that lovely little nef. Ah, Bramfield might laugh and tease her and be sceptical, but it remained true, and would remain true, that she had never made a mistake about an emerald. About a ruby — yes, she admitted, and she had kept it in the safe as a reminder of her mistake. But about an emerald — no.

A desire seized her to have a look at her treasures hidden away in the safe. She rose, and with trembling hands, as the desire grew stronger and her passion for precious stones leapt to a fierce flame, she detached from her neck the ribbon with the key, and opened the safe. And then she was once more in her own world, in those magic realms in which she loved to wander. The outer life fell from her as a garment.

Yes, they were all there, opals and pearls and rubies, sapphires, emeralds and diamonds, all her choicest treasures, and others of less value but prized for some special characteristics which appealed to her fantasy. Face to face with them again, she adored them, gloated over them, crooned over them, could not bring herself to leave them alone, but kept on taking them out, then replacing them, then taking them out again, now in batches, now singly, choosing out her favourites, and so on and on with all the stones, even as a mother might caress one child and then another and begin all over again, laughing softly perhaps from very joy. So Tamar laughed. She was extraordinarily happy, and held in an ecstasy.

But suddenly she heard a cough. She remembered then only that she was not alone, and glancing round, saw that the mountain of rugs and cloaks had become dislodged, and that Gertrude Linton was sitting up in their midst, staring at her. Instinctively Tamar tried to conceal her treasures by spreading her hands over her lap in which they were reposing.

"What on earth did you do that for?" Miss Linton asked. "I don't want to grab any of those footling things."

"Footling things, indeed," Tamar said indignantly. "Why, they are most valuable — priceless some of them."

"Well, then, how rich you must be," the other rejoined sleepily. "Why, you could charter dozens of relief ships and adopt all the refugees in all the barges and railway sheds. Not to speak of Marie Louise. You must certainly adopt *her*, T. Scott. It's up to you to do so. I won't after what I've seen. Well, good-night again."

She disappeared beneath the rugs again, and was soon sound asleep once more. Tamar sat for a while with the jewels still spread in her lap, but she no longer fingered them.

"*She* didn't want to clutch them," she said aloud. And a shudder passed through her as she remembered the incident at Bergen-op-Zoom, of which she remained bitterly ashamed.

Again that amazing disinterestedness which had been such a revelation to her held her thoughts. These lovely stones in all their glittering beauty — and the only impression made by them on Gertrude Linton's mind was their usefulness for chartering relief ships and feeding and adopting refugees. Yes, there was something baffling in that quality of character. She would never be able to understand it — and never to acquire it. Not if she lived a hundred, a thousand years.

Ah, what about Marie Louise upstairs? Was the child sleeping peacefully? She had better go up and see if all were well with her. But stay — how would it be if she found her a little trinket — the sort of thing she had wished to give her in Rotterdam — something which she herself did not very much mind parting from

— something which would not be too great a sacrifice? The child would be pleased, and the pleasure might be helpful and healing. Nothing from the inner-room safe, of course. That would be ridiculous. But perhaps a little bracelet from one of the cheap trays in the outer shop. That little thin, old-fashioned one with the garnet in. No, that was too good. She could not give that away. But there would be some other equally suitable, and not so saleable.

Tamar shut the safe, lit a candle and crept into the outer shop. She glanced around, and then stood as if greeting the objects so familiar to her. She chose one or two trays of mixed jewels, put them on the counter, studied them attentively, and finally selected a tiny pendant and a chain, imitation Renaissance, very charming but not valuable. But, except Tom's amulet, she had never before given anything away, and she was therefore making a tremendous sacrifice of habit, if not of money. Once she nearly restored the trinket to its accustomed tray, but changed her mind and passed upstairs to her room.

Marie Louise was fast asleep, but moaning in her dreams and murmuring:

"*Non, non, je reste avec toi; non, non, je reste avec toi.*"

Very beautiful looked Tamar as she heard those words. She knelt down by her side, and with a gentleness of which no one could have thought her capable, fastened the chain twice round the girl's wrist.

"She will find it when she wakes," she said.

CHAPTER XI

OFF to Dulwich sped Miss Linton, restored to life and renewed endeavour after a night of repose entirely undisturbed by thoughts of the war, or by haunting memories of that vision of precious stones vouchsafed to her for one fleeting moment in the inner room. Monsieur and Madame Gérardin, the old Belgian couple, who were awaiting anxiously her report of the search, received her with trembling excitement. Grand'mère kept on saying:

"Ah, Madame, you would know her by her bright eyes, dancing with happiness, and her joyous laugh. Such a laugh, isn't it, Grandpère?"

But grandpère shook his head and said:

"Hélas! perhaps her young eyes were not bright any longer, chérie; and perhaps there was no ringing laughter such as we knew before these terrible times."

Then Gertrude Linton, with a merciful reticence, gave an account of the young girl whom she had found in the hold of the barge, alone and desolate, and not very strong, and —

"Well, you see," she said gently, "it often happens that with a great shock, such as this poor child has had, one's memory goes. But it comes back. Of course it comes back. And this child, whoever she is, has already made some improvement. Every day makes a difference to her. But we cannot be sure that she is your little Marie Louise. Absolutely the only clue we went on,

was that she appears to recognize the name of the dog. But we've brought her to England on the sporting chance. And if you are destined to be disappointed, all I can say is you must try to forgive us, and we will go on with the search."

They thanked her with tears in their eyes, and started off for Dean Street full of hope and of good courage, buoyed up with Miss Linton's cheerfulness and belief that good fortune might be awaiting them.

"There is no doubt," she said, "that Fido's name did strike some chord in her memory. And wasn't it a good idea to try her with that? It was not my idea. It was the idea of the lady to whose house we are going now. It was an inspiration — simple, like all inspirations."

"Ah," sighed Madame Gérardin, "if it could only come true that Fido, always the good, patient friend of the children, should on this occasion, too, prove to be the kind friend of us all."

Gertrude Linton pressed the arm which clung to her for support, repeated the story several times, at the request now of Grandpère, now of Grand'mère, listened with unfailing interest to the history of Marie Louise from the moment she had been born until the time when, in the terrible flight, she had been torn from their side, and nodded sympathetically as she heard the long list of all her qualities and talents. Never in the world's history had there been such a wonderful young girl as Marie Louise, never any one so sweet, so bright and so beautiful.

"Of course not, of course not," said Miss Linton, with a tug at her heart, as she saw with her mind's eye that wreck of a young girl, desolate and suffering and

distraught at the moment of her rescue, and even now only at the beginning of a recovery which would probably take months of tender care.

And meanwhile Marie Louise was keeping company with Tamar in the shop. She wore round her neck the little chain and Renaissance pendant which she fiddled with from time to time, to make sure that this treasure was still in her safe possession. She was evidently delighted with it, for she glanced at Tamar, pointed to it and smiled a ghost of a smile. She had not yet arrived at the stage of desiring conversation; indeed, scarcely a word escaped her lips. But her silence was a help rather than a bar to successful intercourse with Tamar, whose French, like that of some of England's Foreign Officials, was strictly limited. She had, however, unearthed a French dictionary and placed it on the counter, in case of pressing need. But so far it had not been called into requisition; for there were far more easy and agreeable means of intercommunion then mere language: china figures, bronze figures, lovely silver boxes and bonbonnières, candle-sticks, crucifixes, benitiers, brass warming-pans, cups and saucers and plates and cases of rings and all sorts of jewellery and antiques. Tamar reviewed her possessions, dusted them, searched the walls with lynx-eyes to make sure that nothing was missing, and was followed close at heel by Marie Louise, who stared at the things intently, touched them now and then, and was certainly interested in them, in her frightened, bewildered way. But the sound of the shop-bell sent her each time flying like some scared animal into the inner room; and on the fourth occasion Tamar showed positive resentment to the unfortunate intruder who had

dared to enter the shop and cause a disturbance of the atmosphere.

"Well, what do you want?" she said in her brusque, uncompromising way to the offending party, a lady well on in years and dressed up to the ninth.

The criminal glared at her through her lorgnette and answered:

"I did want that large silver buckle in your window. I had taken a fancy to it. But I don't think I want to buy anything from such an exceedingly rude person. I cannot imagine you do much business if this is the way you conduct your affairs."

Tamar smiled one of her grim smiles as the lady walked out of the shop.

"She will return another time," she said. "They always return when they take a fancy to a thing. And as for business, well, my good woman with the lorgnette, so far I have been able to save myself from the workhouse — rudeness or no rudeness."

Then, the coast being clear, she coaxed her little friend back, and was succeeding in amusing and interesting Marie Louise's fitful mind, when once more the bell rang, and off dashed the child.

But Grand'mère and Grandpère had seen her. They followed her into the inner room, almost stumbling over each other in their haste.

"Grand'mère! Grandpère!" cried the girl, as she was gathered to their hearts.

Tamar leaned over the counter, staring into empty space, and Gertrude Linton stood, with her eyes fixed on the ground. Neither spoke. Before each of them

rose a vision of that barge, the dim light, the desolation, the despair of the scene, the girl in the far-off corner rocking herself from side to side and moaning, always moaning, forlorn, unclaimed, unloved, unidentified, lost, doomed.

And they had found and rescued her.

CHAPTER XII

GERTRUDE LINTON, after receiving further instructions for her work at Flushing, returned to Holland.

Tamar and she parted from each other with marked regret.

"Good-bye, T. Scott," she said, "but don't flatter yourself that you've got rid of me. If I'm not torpedoed, you'll see me again soon. For very much do I approve of Dean Street, the inner room and that Jacobean couch where I had the best night's rest in my life. You have not invited me to come again, but suppose I did come? What then? You wouldn't turn me out, would you?"

"Probably not," Tamar said, with a soft little laugh.

"And supposing I was to bring another refugee with me?" Miss Linton went on, half teasingly, half in earnest. "For there's no knowing what might happen in these strange days. Would you be likely to turn that refugee out?"

"Probably not," Tamar answered.

"You haven't found visitors so formidable?" Gertrude Linton asked.

"No," Tamar said with a smile, "I've rather liked them."

"All right, then," the other said. "Expect me at any time, with any one! I may even have to ask you to adopt some one. You know you really ought to

adopt some one, now that we have landed Marie Louise safely with her own people. Yes, you really ought, with all that hidden wealth of yours. You must be rolling in money, like the shipowners. I only caught a glimpse of those treasures, partly because I was so sleepy and partly because you hid them up at once. Did you really think I was going to leap on you, murder you and dash off with them? I believe you did."

"If I had been the one to see them, I should have wanted them," Tamar said, half ashamed, half sullen at the remembrance of the precaution she had taken.

"Well, all I can say is, I want them now," Gertrude Linton went on. "Yes, I should like about a thousand pounds for our own English Refugee Committee, and another thousand for the Friends, to help carry out their work of reconstruction, and about two or three for the American Relief Commission. Ah, I have it! Why not begin by sending a good round sum direct to that authoress who was writing the appeal? You found the title for her: '*Cargoes of Mercy.*' Why not find some money, too? That's a good idea, isn't it?"

"A very good idea, coming from some one who has not to find the good round sum," Tamar remarked with some amusement.

Miss Linton laughed.

"Think about it, T. Scott," she said. "And now, good-bye. And as I observed before, don't imagine for one moment that you have got rid of me. There's a bond between us — the bond of the little derelict we found — and lost. I miss Marie Louise. I believe you miss her."

"Perhaps I do," Tamar said, turning away. "You

see, she clung to me. No one has ever clung to me before."

For a moment she remained silent, and then she held out her hand and said:

"I like you. Even if there had been no memory of our search for Marie Louise to bind us together, I should have felt a bond. So when you return, I shall not be sorry. If you bring any one with you, I shall not be angry. Do as you please. I will be ready for you."

"Is that a promise?" Gertrude Linton asked.

"Yes, it's a promise," Tamar said, nodding her head. "And it's a tribute to your disinterestedness."

"You've got a bee in your bonnet about disinterestedness," Gertrude Linton said.

"I think I have," Tamar agreed. "I rather wish I hadn't. It perplexes me."

"Well, let it perplex you to the tune of several good round sums," was Gertrude Linton's parting shot.

Alone, Tamar repeated her words with an amused smile on her face.

"A splendid idea," she said, "from some one who has not to find those good round sums!"

But the words and the thoughts they suggested, haunted her, and for some time after Gertrude Linton had gone, Tamar leaned over the counter, as was her wont when concentrating on some difficult problem. Finally she took from a drawer the book in which she kept the details of her investments, and studied them carefully. At intervals she shook her head, as if deciding that no good round sums could be raised from these sources, as selling prices were going steadily down. In the midst of her investigations Bramfield arrived with a

case containing the Dutch nefs and the other silver pieces, which had been sent to his place of business in Hatton Garden. There was a twinkle in his eye and a look of mischief on his face, and he was evidently enjoying a huge joke. Bramfield always looked handsome and attractive, but when his countenance was lit up by even a suspicion of fun, it would have been impossible to find any face more delightful to behold, more winning, more reassuring — reassuring because there was a certain statuesque quality in his features, which at times lent him an aloofness totally at variance with his natural character.

"Tamar," he said, "here are your nefs and the other things. I've carried out your wishes and had an independent opinion about that stone in the crow's-nest. Sorry to have to inform you that it isn't a valuable emerald! See now, here it is out of its setting, and very different it looks. It's just a reconstructed emerald — rather a good one. But you've made a mistake this time, you jolly well have! The old Dutch woman got her bargain — and T. Scott has been left. I really can't help laughing. It strikes me as being exceedingly funny that the great Tamar, dealer in antique jewellery and precious stones, and an expert in emeralds, her birth-stone, should have been left! I think the *schaperkaas* and *pekel-haring* must have affected your brain!"

For the life of him, he could not help teasing her about her error in judgment, though he might have been warned of the consequences by the ominous frown deepening on Tamar's face. But he was so amused that he thoroughly let himself go, and chuckled over the situation. He had placed all the silver on the counter, but he retained the stone in the palm of his hand.

"Reconstructed, T. Scott," he repeated. "Reconstructed. And to think that you of all people were misled — you who have never made a mistake about an emerald."

Her face flushed to a crimson from rage and disappointment as she snatched the stone from him, stared at it in silence and then disappeared into the inner room to use her magnifying glass and apply her own special tests. She returned, looking like a tigress at bay.

"It has been changed," she exclaimed fiercely. "The stone I saw had every appearance of being a real emerald, and a specially fine one. This is obviously reconstructed. Any fool could see that. It has been changed. Perhaps you've changed it yourself to spite me — to rob me."

And then a curious thing happened. Bramfield, for years a patient, devoted friend who had never failed her, always put up with her sullenness and sulkiness, never taken umbrage at her many varying moods, and always made excuses for her, both to himself and other people who were criticizing, condemning her, turned on her.

"You mean-spirited, contemptible woman," he exclaimed, snatching up his hat. "Why does one ever trouble about you? You're not worth a thought. You deserve to be left friendless — and that's what will happen to you — mark my words."

Bramfield, the beautiful, the chivalrous, fled from the shop, his face distorted with anger.

Tamar's own rage died down as quickly as it had sprung to life. Her eyes closed and opened, and closed and opened again, as if she were not sure of what had happened — so great was her surprise, so entire the

shock to her nerves that he should have turned on her. It had all passed so quickly that she scarcely knew why or how it had happened.

These many years she had been accustomed and privileged to do and say all the rudenesses she pleased, to give way to her temper, her suspiciousness, her every mood. And now she had been tripped up. Some one had called her by an ugly name, told her what he thought of her, how worthless, how negligible. And that some one was Bramfield. It was incredible, unbearable that she should have alienated him — and because of a petty, paltry, reconstructed emerald. It did cross her mind that any quarrel might have been worth while over a real emerald — but certainly a reconstructed one did not warrant the flinging aside of an old friendship — no, indeed it did not. But to do her justice, this thought of what was worth while and what wasn't, only flashed across her mind and was gone. What remained, was real concern for what she had done, real contrition, and a deep sense of disappointment and loneliness.

For she had been counting on his coming. She missed his constant companionship. She had learnt to value and appreciate him tenfold more in those three weeks of intimate, everyday life. His protective rebuke of her avaricious impulse had touched her to the core. His tender understanding of her shame had chastened her. His healing kindness had upheld her.

He had only had time to run in once or twice for a few minutes since their return, and she wanted sorely to talk with him over all their experiences together, to hear about the Belgian lady whom he had taken safely to her friends in Ealing, to tell him about Marie Louise, and

discuss with him all those hundred and one details which those who have taken a journey together and had thrilling adventures, hunger to browse on in each other's company. And instead, she was alone — Mary Louise gone — Miss Linton gone — Bramfield gone. And the loneliness brought about entirely by her own fault.

Why could she not have accepted her defeat over the emerald in a sporting spirit, and why could she not have been good-natured over his triumphant teasing? She had liked him to tease her in Rotterdam. She had liked it increasingly. And after all, though she had allowed Weduwe Maas to overreach her because she believed that she herself was scoring in the long run, she had only paid a very few more pounds than the market value of the Dutch nef. A very few more. That was annoying, of course, and still more annoying was the fact of her mistake — a wound to her professional pride and expert knowledge. But what counted most and hurt most, was her insult to Bramfield, and his retort to her, scathing and ruthless, but deserved.

"I've deserved it, Bramfield," she said aloud, "and your words will probably come true. I shall be left friendless. That will be the end of me."

Then she tried to comfort herself.

"Perhaps he will return," she thought. "Surely he'll return. It's unlike him to be unkind."

She longed to see him come into the shop, to hear his voice, to feel his presence, to ask his pardon. In her remorse, in her recognition of her ingratitude, Tamar came far nearer to loving Bramfield than at any other moment in the course of their long friendship. And the irony of life contrived that at the very hour when she advanced towards that enchanted ground where

hearts meet and souls are knit, Bramfield who had lingered there for years in hope and yearning, receded.

But Tamar was not destined to pass the whole day without comfort, little though she deserved it. Out of the leaden sky broke a bright flash of sunshine. Some time in the afternoon, into the shop tumbled Tom Thornton, bringing with him healing breezes of youthfulness and gaiety.

"Hullo," he sang out, as he nearly wrung her arm off. "I'm glad you're back in your own dug-out. I'm not half pleased to see you again! Marion and I called here the other day and found some snuffy old commissionaire in charge who seemed to think we'd come to burgle. Such a lot of news to tell you. More jewels been found in another dummy book — the 'Satires of Juvenal' this time. Great, isn't it? Clever of the Governor to pitch on books which he knew we would never have touched at the end of a pair of tongs! Also, the monk ghost has turned up at Marton Grange, looking in at the window of the library as usual. Also, we're established as a family in a flat in Russell Square. Also, I haven't passed all my examinations. Have been put back for map reading. I'm not down-hearted. But you are, aren't you? What's up?"

"Nothing's up," she answered, forcing a smile. "Except that I've mistaken a reconstructed emerald for a real one."

Tom whistled.

"Have you been 'done,' then, and lost a whole pot of money?" he asked.

Tamar's proper answer should have been:

"No, but I failed to 'do' some one else!"

Instead, she answered:

"No, but I took a sporting chance on something — and lost."

"Never mind," he said. "Buck up. I'll ferret out an emerald or two for you. I expect we shall soon find some more knocking about in a soap-box, or in the kitchen flue."

Tamar laughed. Tom's cheerfulness was infectious.

"Now, would you believe it?" he went on. "Winifred rather wanted to persuade the Mater to let Marton Grange. Rupert wouldn't hear of it. He loves that old place. Did you ever hear anything so footling? Why, we may have jewels turning up any old where. Anyway, we're not going to let the house. And the Mater will probably sneak back there as soon as we let her. She feels rather strange in London, you know, though she pretends to like Russell Square for our sakes."

Then he went on to say that what he had really come for, was to fetch her back to their flat. They wanted her to tell them about their new find, and they all wanted to see her and hear how she had been getting on in Holland. So couldn't she just put on her things and come along at once? He and two friends had got leave till to-morrow, and so he wouldn't have to hurry off to Oxford that night, and they were having a sort of rally of a few intimates to celebrate his not getting through all his examinations, and to give Rupert's girl, Dorothy Hall, a send-off before she rejoined her Ambulance Corps in Belgium. Wouldn't Miss Scott come and take part?

Tamar consented, for his arrival had braced her up, and she dreaded the loneliness which she knew would

follow on his departure. As she went upstairs to put on her coat, leaving Tom in charge of the shop, she could not help smiling to think how she was gradually breaking into her habits of years, doing things which she would never have dreamed of doing — for instance, leaving a comparative stranger alone in the shop, even for five minutes, going to spend the evening out at some one's house, and turning her back with positive relief — that was the amazing part of it — with positive relief on her own stronghold and her treasures, which had always meant so much more to her than mere human beings. As a babe, she had been rocked amongst them, as a child she had played with them, as a young woman she had learnt to value them in more senses than one, and as a middle-aged woman she had come to dote on them to the exclusion of everything else — until now. She heard Tom whistling downstairs. She heard him calling out:

"Cheerioh, I'll put the shutters up for you."

And she smiled. Very pleasant and comforting that sounded.

Tamar found quite a number of young people in a large, cosily-furnished room. They were laughing and having no end of fun when she and Tom entered. Marion, in a pretty drab uniform, with a light blue collar and blue shoulder-straps marked with the letters "W.H.C.," made a dash for her. Rupert and Dorothy Hall, in her "F.A.N.Y." khaki, followed suit. Winifred, in a dark blue uniform, with a blue armlet marked "W.P.S." (Women Police Service), and looking every inch an authoritative guardian of the peace, greeted her with less effusion but decided cordiality. She was saluted by a young New Zealand soldier and two of Tom's

comrades from the Military School of Aeronautics at Oxford. A tall girl, also in khaki, with the shining brass letters "W.V.R." on her shoulders and evidently an officer in rank, nodded to her in a friendly fashion. Two other girls not in uniform, and a Red Cross nurse, completed the number. She thought at first that she was going to feel embarrassed amongst all these young creatures; but they did not give her a chance to be uncomfortable, and accepted her immediately as one of themselves.

"Great evening, this," Dorothy said, "Tom not passing all his examinations at first shot!"

"Great evening, this," returned Tom, "Dorothy returning to Belgium to drive the poor unfortunate wounded Belgian soldiers. Glad I'm not a wounded Belgian!"

"Rough luck on me, having to part from her, isn't it?" said Rupert. "But I've got to make the best of it, as the women do when we go off. There doesn't seem much chance of our having the one and only home yet."

"Perhaps it's as well, old thing," said Tom. "Just as well to postpone the failure a little while. Give you time to finish the Governor's book on archaeology, and Dorothy to spill a few more Belgians out of her ambulance."

"It isn't really true that he has passed all his examinations except aerial observation, is it?" asked Dorothy of Tom's comrades. "The Royal Flying Corps must be wanting officers badly and quickly!"

There was a chorus of laughter in which Tom joined, and in the middle Mrs. Thornton came in, and wanted to take Tamar away with her to examine the stones in private. But Tom protested.

"No, Mater," he said, "don't go away. I'll fetch the old dummy book, and then we can all have the fun of hearing Miss Scott pronounce judgment. It will be rather amusing. You won't mind having an audience, Miss Scott?"

"No, I wouldn't mind, but I think your mother would," Tamar said quietly.

"Don't press it, Tom dear," Marion whispered. "Mother wants to be alone. She'll be sure to feel rather wretched, you know."

He nodded.

"Of course," he said, "what a fool I am. I'd forgotten the cambric handkerchief."

So Mrs. Thornton bore Tamar off to the privacy of her own room, and shut the door.

She turned to Tamar, and with a tender little smile said:

"Neither Tom, bless him, nor indeed any one of my young people quite realizes that all the circumstances connected with the finding of these jewels are still very painful to me. I do not mean to pretend that I have not been exceedingly glad that my poor husband collected them, and that we therefore were left in far better circumstances. But that he kept them hidden from us, remains and always will remain a grief to me."

Tamar nodded her head in silence.

"But for you," continued Mrs. Thornton, "I do not know what I should have done. The wonderful way in which you interpreted his mind and its workings has comforted me more than I can ever say. I shall always be grateful to you, dear Miss Scott, for understanding — and helping me to understand."

"There is nothing to be grateful for," Tamar said

kindly. "It has just been a coincidence that the person who came to value the stones, happened to have the same sort of — well, shall I say almost mad passion for them that your husband had. If you try to remember that it was an obsession, a passion, you will not suffer so much, because you will realize afresh that it was something altogether outside himself. You don't suffer as much as you did at first, I hope?"

"No," she said, but even as she spoke there seemed to be a possibility that the cambric handkerchief might have to be produced.

But the danger passed, and she was able to continue:

"And then, of course, I have the great joy of seeing the young people happy and of being able to give them the chances they wanted — and the freedom. I want them to be free, and feel free. Whatever they are doing, this flat will at least be a rallying-place for them all. But I tell you, as a secret, that I do not really care to be here. I shall be glad soon to creep back to Marton Grange — to my old life and my memories. No, I do not suffer so much, but I owe this to you. And now again, as before, your presence and your explanation reassure me. Do you remember what I said before: '*Something lost recovered*'? Well, again I say it: '*Something lost recovered.*'"

"Strange that I should be able to comfort any one," Tamar said, half to herself.

"Oh, no, surely not strange," Mrs. Thornton said, "you, with your kind nature."

Tamar winced.

"Kind nature?" she repeated, almost roughly. "Why, I'm a brute, if you only knew — grasping, suspicious, hard as nails, dis . . ."

"Hush, hush," interrupted Mrs. Thornton. "I won't hear such things of you. Whatever you are, you've not been that to us."

"But I have," Tamar insisted, half defiantly. "I was grasping about the pearls. Didn't Mr. Rupert tell you?"

Mrs. Thornton shook her head.

"He told me you wanted them," she said, "and that we were to keep them back indefinitely until you cared to buy them. That doesn't sound very grasping, does it?"

Tamar was silent. In her silence she thanked Rupert for his second act of chivalry.

"The children think no end of you," Mrs. Thornton went on. "All of them. I only hope they will not be a worry to you; but they do seem to think they have a right to come to Dean Street! You must shut the door on them if they trouble you."

"They have a right," Tamar said. "And the door shall never be shut on them."

"You see," Mrs. Thornton said, "when you came to us that memorable day, you established a relationship with us all because you brought good news, and also because you were able to explain — and to heal. You wouldn't think Tom needed healing. Yet in his way he had the same feeling of having been shut out — and Marion had it and Winifred and Rupert."

She was silent a moment, as if lost in thought. It was still evident that no precious stones would ever compensate her for the discovery of that barrier which her husband had set up against his wife and children and the whole world. Then, as if with reluctance, she opened a drawer of the bureau and took out a box in the form of a dummy book, which had the words,

"Satires of Juvenal," on its back. She placed it without a word in Tamar's hands. Tamar glanced at the book-box with curious interest. It passed through her mind that Mr. Thornton had indeed been a strange man, but not stranger than some of the extraordinary characters with whom in the course of her business she had come in contact.

She raised the lid and set about examining the stones. Mrs. Thornton stared fixedly into the fire. Not once did she ask a question, nor show any interest.

There were a few tourmalines and topazes, and two reconstructed emeralds which gave Tamar a shudder; but most of the stones were semi-precious, such as azurite, lapis-lazuli, jargoon, iolite, zircon, and others, truly beautiful, and interesting scientifically, but not of great value from a gem dealer's point of view, so Tamar told her. Mrs. Thornton did not seem in the least disappointed by the verdict, but merely replaced the box in the drawer, took up her knitting, and said:

"And now let us join the young people again."

But Tamar detained her.

"Do you know," she said, "I am glad that little collection has been found, Mrs. Thornton. And do you know why?"

Mrs. Thornton shook her head.

"Do you not see," Tamar said slowly, "that your husband's habit of hiding away his stones was not based on any desire to keep things of value from your knowledge, but that his obsession demanded an entire secrecy? And so these comparatively valueless stones were hidden away with precisely the same care and craft as the rubies and sapphires and emeralds which have realized a fortune for you. I believe it was an obsession which

was entirely without any plan of unkindness. That is how it seems to me."

"I will remember," Mrs. Thornton said, as she put her hand on Tamar's arm. There was something pathetic in her entire confidence in Tamar's words and Tamar's estimate of her husband's character. It was as if she had found in the darkness of her distress an unexpected straw at which she had clutched and to which she would always want to cling for safety and guidance.

None of the family seemed disappointed when they heard the news that the "Satires of Juvenal" had yielded up no plunder worthy of the name. Winifred who had found the box, said that she was rather relieved to learn that the contents were not valuable. She thought they had quite enough. Marion who, like her mother, was still sensitive about Mr. Thornton's strange secrecy, made no remark. Tom said:

"The more the merrier. But if not more, then not less merry."

Rupert, who having studied Tamar's book more carefully, was beginning to think himself quite an expert and give himself professional airs, said:

"It is not a surprise to me. I knew at once that the stones in that box were not valuable."

Tamar was greatly amused and had a secret laugh over the wise, expert expression on his face.

Tom inquired of her on the quiet how his mother had borne the interview.

"I hope no sign of the cambric handkerchief?" he asked.

"A faint sign," reported Tamar, "which she sup-

pressed very bravely, Mr. Tom. But I think she suffers. You must look after her."

She watched him after that drop down on the sofa by his mother's side and work hard to bring a smile into her face. He teased her about the size of the socks she was knitting for the mine-sweepers and men of the Navy, and asked whether they were intended for socks or sleeping-bags, or whether it was some new pattern she had invented to serve both purposes. Hadn't she better take out a patent for it and submit it to the Government to be ignominiously rejected, and immediately accepted by the French or any of our Allies — nay, perhaps annexed by the Germans themselves through some of the uninterned Germans enjoying themselves comfortably on our hospitable shores. So he rattled on, and did not relax his efforts until the cloud had cleared from her face.

Rupert asked Tamar to tell them about her adventures in Holland. She gave a brief, a very brief account of the refugees, the American Relief Ships, the escaped French prisoners on board and the spies; and she told them a few of the stories she had heard of the behaviour of the Germans in Belgium.

"My God," one of the flying cadets said with a shudder, "suppose it was our country."

But on the whole, they seemed more interested in the fact that she had been down in a submarine. No one present had been in a submarine, and her experience in that direction elicited an amount of interest and respect which the most thrilling story about refugees would have failed to arouse in their minds! It struck Tamar how little the events of the war were touching the people in England.

They soon plunged into their own immediate concerns, and she was glad enough to listen to their talk and discussions, and to ask them a few questions about what they were all doing. They interested her enormously, and presented to her a new world of which she had hitherto been entirely ignorant. In spite of all their chaff of each other, their fun and joyous irresponsibility, it was quite clear that they all knew what they intended to do, and had very definite ideas about their capabilities, their usefulness, and the parts they would be called upon to play, if not now, then sooner or later. A regular "churn up" was going on, so they put it, and there were going to be all sorts of changes.

Winifred was very emphatic on this point. She was in good spirits about the outlook for the Women Police Service, for there was a rumour in her set that women police were going to be posted in some of the munition factories, where already large numbers of girls were working in the manufacture of some of the most dangerous explosives demanded by the war. She was keen about the need for trained and educated police-women, and quite certain from her own experiences in patrolling the streets and public parks and neighbourhoods of camps, that the work of their corps would prove to be of real assistance in this time of upheaval. So far, she said, they had had discouragement from the Government, but great encouragement from private societies and municipal authorities and watch committees. She explained to Tamar that they had to have a very high standard of training, not only in the technique of public work, but in discretion and wisdom of action. Training alone saved them from tactless mistakes. The

training included drill, attendance at police courts, first aid, lectures in civil and criminal law — especially those Acts relating to women and children, patrolling and domiciliary visiting. Two or three of the boroughs in London and several in the provinces were already employing women constables, their salaries being paid for by public subscription. She herself had been in Birmingham, but was now stationed in London. She was now a sub-inspector and very proud of her promotion, and exceedingly enthusiastic about her commandant. Tamar thought it would be impossible to find any one more suited to her job than this clear-faced, blue-eyed, calm young woman, with a quiet manner giving a distinct impression of resourceful reliability — an asset in itself — and a real passion for social reform. She seemed as much born for this vocation as the flying boys for theirs, with the right physique and the right outlook.

The flying boys talked chiefly about flying, and the exploits of some of the famous airmen at the Front. Tamar, hearing what these young fellows were expected to learn and digest in their six or seven weeks' course at their School of Instruction, looked upon them with added wonder. How they could swallow engines, rigging, theory of flight, cross-country flying, wireless, map-reading, meteorology, construction of bombs and machine guns, aerial photography and countless other subjects — and yet be alive — very much alive, filled her with amazement.

"Oh, it's nothing," said Tom. "Extraordinarily easy — specially when you don't pass!"

The New Zealander was thrilled at being in London,

and could only speak of all the sights he had been seeing — Westminster Abbey, Saint Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, the Strand, Piccadilly, and the Mansion House, Holborn Bars, the Temple, and all the old buildings. He said he was dead-set on old buildings.

"I say, old chap, you really ought to come and stay with us in our old place in Yorkshire," Tom said. "About three or four centuries old, you know, and with a property ghost — a monk who comes and looks in at the window and makes faces at you. And a bricked-up skeleton for all we know. No Colonial ought to miss it. The finest sensation of the Motherland. You ought to get an invitation out of the Mater."

"Yes, you ought," Mrs. Thornton said, looking up and smiling from her knitting.

"You bet I'll come, then, the first chance I get," the New Zealander said, flushing with pleasure. He was but one of the thousands of Colonial boys who, a little lonely and homesick in the Old Country, have brightened up at the prospect of a bit of home life offered them.

Marion told Tamar a few details about the St. Ursula Military Hospital where she was a nursing orderly. She was very proud of the hospital. The C. O., she said, the Surgeon-in-Chief, the surgeons and doctors, the bacteriologist, the radiographer, the oculist, and the whole medical staff were women. With the exception of the Sergeant-Major and two or three R. A. M. C. men who were going shortly to the Front, women only were doing the work of the hospital. Miss Scott ought to come and see it some day. She would be interested. Wouldn't she come? It was so near her shop, that it

wouldn't be much trouble to run in if Marion got a permit for her. Tamar, who had a tender spot in her heart for Marion, her first friend amongst the Thornton children, did not tell her that she had not the least desire to visit that, or, indeed, any hospital. Illness was not in her line. Like many others, she shrank from it and was rather frightened of sick people. The last thing she wanted to do was to visit wounded soldiers. She evaded giving a promise, and murmured something about "no time in the afternoon." But she was not at all prejudiced against women doctors. If anything, she was in favour of them; for one of them, a distinguished member of her profession, had come to Dean Street one day and bought a Limoges enamel, over which she had been very easily and successfully cheated.

"You come to me instead," she said to Marion. "As you are so near, you can run in for tea."

It was whilst Marion was telling her about the hospital that Major Currie, the dug-out uncle of the family, arrived on the scene. The flying boys were making the statement that the war would finally be decided in the air. Major Currie entirely disagreed, and treated their remarks with patronizing amusement. He vouchsafed a few arguments which were listened to with a bored resignation which struck Tamar as being exceedingly funny. Tom's face alone was a study; he leaned back, digging the base of his skull into the back of his chair, his eyes raised to the ceiling, and his mouth opening and shutting slightly. He was really very naughty, and kept on murmuring:

"Old blighter — old blighter."

"Try and stick it," Rupert said to Tom in an undertone. "He's going to supper with another old dug-out

at the 'Carlton.' I heard him say so. He'll soon be off."

"All right," replied Tom in the same undertone. "But can't you get Winifred to arrest him and take him off at once? That's what I want to know."

Finally the Major rose to go, having delivered himself of much patronage and old-time military unwisdom. He glanced pleasantly at the un-uniformed girls, one of whom was doing a twelve-hours' shift at a canteen for the troops at Victoria Station. (Later, she worked at a munition factory, in one of the danger departments.) The other, a delightful singer, was a member of a concert party organized for the entertainment of the troops of the New Army now training in England. She toured all over the country, grateful to offer her best gift to the men who were going to fight for her. (Later, much of the organizing of the entertainments for our soldiers in France passed into her able hands.) On her, too, the Major deigned to bestow his benediction, and accepted the Red Cross nurse as a type familiar enough not to be resented. But the uniformed maidens he evidently disapproved of entirely, and he singled out the tall khaki girl, glared at her and said, with a half contemptuous little smile on his ruddy face:

"And, pray, what are you?"

"I'm a captain in the Women's Volunteer Reserve," she answered. "At present not wanted by the War Office, but preparing, like all of us women, for the future needs of the country."

"My dear young lady, it's very kind of you, I'm sure," he said, "and very amusing for you, I'm sure — but very unnecessary — entirely unnecessary and somewhat absurd."

But Captain Ella Lulworth, who had been a suffragette in those far-off days before the war, feared neither man nor Major. She glared at him a moment, and then said with apparent irrelevance:

"Have you ever been in Germany, sir?"

"No, I cannot say I have," he answered stiffly.

"I thought not," she returned benevolently. "Well, I have, for five years — in a German school. And I know how they've been preparing for this war, and educating all their young people for it. We're in for a long affair, sir, and all of us will be wanted — men and women, too. Wait and see, sir. For all you know, when you're made a colonel, I may have the honour of being your adjutant."

The Major beat a speedy retreat with dignity, but in haste, conscious that Captain Ella Lulworth was too much for him.

"Routed, but not convinced," she said, laughing. "Never mind. Time will show."

Time did show. The Women's Volunteer Reserve, laughed at in the beginning, was but the very gallant precursor of our very gallant W. A. A. Cs.

After Major Currie had gone, they held an animated discussion on the subject. Tamar was greatly interested to see that although there was a little good-natured chaff about this question of women's services, which was quite new to her, there was no real opposition on the part of the young men. It was taken for granted by them all that this was a "churn up," and everybody was "in it." Tamar, listening to them all, felt churned up herself, and even more bewildered than she had been in Holland. When they fell into a talk abou. politicians and crowned heads, the rights of the

people and war, her brain fairly reeled. She thought with sudden longing of the precious stones in her safe, so peaceful and unexacting in their luscious beauty. Some of the company maintained that war was necessary and uplifting and purifying; but Rupert vowed it was nothing of the sort.

"All bosh," he said. "It appeals to our most barbarous instincts. When we're out of it, the only thing to do is to forget that we've been murderous brutes. That we can forget at all shows that whilst we're at it, it is pure madness — organized madness, and we recognize it as such when we're sane."

The New Zealander took the view that it was altogether glorious.

"Nothing glorious in it," Rupert insisted. "Nothing."

"But deeds of courage are glorious, Rupe," Marion said. And although she would not have dared to refer to it, she thought of his own fine record and the Military Medal lying in his drawer.

"Deeds of courage in peace are every bit as fine as in war," he answered. "And even finer. For in peace there is no incentive, no excitement to egg one on."

Winifred asked Tamar what she thought about war.

Tamar looked dazed by the question, but gathered her wits together.

"I have no views," she said, "and I've never thought about war at all. When this war started, it meant nothing to me. But since I've seen something of the misery of a stricken nation, I have begun to wonder at the madness of statesmen and the stupidity of peoples."

"Then you'd have them rise and rebel and refuse to

fight?" Winifred asked. "That would be all very well if you could get all the people of all the nations to act in concert. But they never would. That's the trouble."

"It's the only solution," Rupert said. "The peoples of the world solid against the politicians and crowned heads of the world until there are no crowned heads and no politicians left — and no wars."

"That won't be in our time," Winifred said.

"Nor in anybody's time," said one of the flying boys.

"No use taking any notice of Rupert," remarked Tom. "We all know he has been a shirker! Come on, Dorothy, as this party is in honour of you and me, let's lead the way in to supper. There's a war on, no doubt about that. And supper ought to be on. No doubt about that, either. Cheerioh!"

They ended by seeing Tamar home. She heard their young voices laughing as they passed up the street. She listened until the sound had died away in the distance, and then she sat down in the inner room.

Memories of the evening and new impressions faded from her mind. She lived over again that pitiable interview with Bramfield, realized afresh her insult to him and his anger with her, and was torn with contrition for the wound she had inflicted on him and the rage roused in him. And apart from her own remorse, an uneasy, almost frightened presentiment began to take hold of her that she had alienated him irretrievably, driven him by her own deliberate choice from her door, from her life.

Then it was that Tamar knew that life was unthinkable without him, and that the impending desolation would be more than she could bear. For he had always been at hand. Never could she say she was alone in

this world as long as Bramfield lived — and loved her. And now, if he forsook her, she would be alone, left, stranded.

In her despair she stretched out her arms to him.

"Bramfield, Bramfield, forgive me," she cried.

CHAPTER XIII

BUT Bramfield did not feel in the least inclined to forgive. He kept rigidly away from Dean Street, and did not allow himself to fall back on the excuse which had done duty on many other occasions, that it was only T. Scott, only one of her ways, and no one need be offended or take umbrage or even take any notice. On the contrary, he was sorry he had not taken more notice and told her a few more unpleasant truths and possibilities whilst he was about it. He reflected that any one who could be so detestable was not worth bothering about, and that he must make up his mind to give her a wide berth and transfer to another direction some of the thought and concern he had been in the habit of bestowing on her and her affairs. For in business matters, too, Bramfield had always kept her in remembrance. He had put many good chances in her way, and frequently stepped aside so that she might have an innings instead of himself. He knew that she knew this, couldn't fail to know it, and had freely acknowledged her indebtedness to him, and therefore he did not seriously believe that she really thought he had been cheating her and substituting a reconstructed emerald for a genuine one. Her outbreak had been caused by her horrid, suspicious temper, and by her annoyance with herself for having been proved in the wrong. But she had no right to work off her spleen in that detestable fashion, and she needed a lesson — and she would get it.

"If she writes to say she is sorry, I shall be silent," he resolved.

Yet Bramfield could not banish her from his mind. He had given her years of devotion and forbearance, and apart from deeper feelings, habits, especially habits of kindness, often more sustaining to the doer of kind acts than to their recipient, are not easily broken. Tamar had become necessary to him; and although his life was full of interests and activities, she had her own citadel in his heart unassailable even by her worst qualities.

So in the days that followed their angry parting, though she remained in disgrace, she was by no means forgotten or successfully relegated to the past. Memories of her stole over him at all times, in all places. He heard that soft, low laugh of hers when she was pleased at something. Her bright, piercing eyes, her shapely hands, her interesting face, vaguely beautiful when she was good, and strangely arresting when she was fierce, pitiless when she was covetous, transient with idealism when she was kind, haunted Bramfield not a little. And she could be kind when she chose to let herself go — and not only with money, but with personal service. But she had always carefully concealed every trace of kindness, as if she were ashamed of having given way to human weakness. Yet he had heard of deeds, now and then, which had rejoiced his heart.

And she was changing, developing in a way he would not have thought possible a few months ago. He had been amazed at some of the things she did in Holland, at her tenderness to the little Belgian child, at her interest in the work which was being carried on by the

strangers he presented her to, at her companionableness, the capabilities of which he had never realized. Queer, strange, repelling, attracting personality that she was — deserving to be left alone and abandoned if one regarded her from one point only — and yet presenting a claim on one's heart-hunger, one's love, one's habits of patience and protectiveness.

And he missed her. Angry though he was, he would have given a great deal to see her, and talk over all the Rotterdam happenings. But he yielded not an inch to his longings, kept to his resolve bravely, and plunged into his many concerns with an increased activity.

Probably he would not have been able to sustain this attitude of steadfast rebellion if he had not been so busy. But apart from his business as diamond merchant, Bramfield had created for himself many demands on his time and strength. His only child Bruce, who had been already a year in the Army on the declaration of war, was a source of great pride to him — and envy, for he was passionately patriotic and would dearly have valued the privilege of fighting for his country. But as he was nearly fifty-seven, that was out of the question. The next best thing was having a son who was one of the immortal First Hundred Thousand. But his age disability did not prevent him from trying to join up. He was, of course, rejected, and in company with thousands of other eager, patriotic, middle-aged men, in splendid condition and of a fine enthusiasm, made clearly to understand that his country had no need for them in any capacity whatsoever.

But he was not one of those who in consequence of this blighting response to all offers of service, sank into apathy and discouragement. He had a friend in the

Traffic Department of one of the great railway systems, who told him that people were needed at the stations to receive and look after the Belgian refugees who were beginning to arrive in great numbers. Bramfield went down to the stations night after night, and found his friend Gertrude Linton engaged in the same work. It was soon seen by the officials of the London Committee formed to deal with the refugee problem in England, that here were two people whose organizing abilities were valuable and must be secured. When the Local Government Board stepped in, their services were still further called into requisition in connection with the actual shipping of the Belgians from Holland; and Bramfield, in addition, was drawn into the American Relief Commission, and became one of the most active members at the London headquarters. So that his personal concerns had little chance of continuous attention, and his personal emotions not much scope for indulgence.

Tamar meantime remained in a condition of penitence combined with foreboding uneasiness, which increased as the days went on and there was no sign of or from Bramfield. She felt extraordinarily lonely, for her journey to Holland, with all the possibilities of fellowship and good-comradeship which had been revealed to her, had shown her what life could bestow, if not passed entirely in the company of precious stones and in secret worship at the shrine of hidden treasures in an inner room. She could not analyse what had happened to her, but she was conscious that the delight and rapture of former days had undergone a modification which was entirely surprising to her. This does not mean that she was not thrilled when she touched

her precious stones, when her eyes feasted on their colour, their lustre and all their magic characteristics which she knew so well. Not to have been thrilled, would have meant that Tamar had ceased to live.

But other feelings constantly thrust themselves in; and even whilst she gazed at her favourite asteria or her most attractive opal, thoughts of Marie Louise, Gertrude Linton, the American Relief Commission people, and Bramfield — always Bramfield — stole over her. When she held in the palm of her hand her most valued sapphire, of choicest cornflower blue, and perfect in tone and transparency, a memory of the cargoes of mercy intruded itself into that fairyland of delight hitherto securely screened off from disturbing outside influences. And forthwith she wrote a cheque for two hundred pounds, and sent it to the authoress who was writing an appeal for the funds of the American Relief Commission. As she gummed up the envelope, she said aloud:

"Little enough to send — and all those thousands and thousands of starving people to feed. Two hundred pounds — and I have thousands more — and what use are they to me?"

It was the first time in her life that she had ever asked herself such a question. Her passionate desire to accumulate money and treasure was inborn in her, a heritage from her mother, as natural to her as singing to the birds, as swiftness of feet to the swift greyhound. And to do her justice, she did not send that gift of two hundred pounds as an act of penitence, to make things right with herself, as she had often done before. She sent it because she wanted to send it, because she had been tremendously stirred at the time

by the scenes she had witnessed, and because the beauty of the sapphire sank into insignificance before the vision which rose up of a gallant ship laden with tons of precious grain, cargoes of mercy for the starving and stricken. Nor did one single thought of Bramfield prompt her in this matter. It was her own free impulse, and it heralded a new era in her history.

After a time, as Bramfield did not come, Tamar, still penitent and wishing to obtain his forgiveness, went to his offices in Hatton Garden and found him out. His manager thought he might probably be at a lapidary's known to them both, and Tamar pursued him there and learnt that he had already gone. Mr. Grierson, the lapidary, an intimate friend of Bramfield's, told her that he was wearing himself out with public service and with anxiety about his boy.

"He looked very troubled today," Grierson added. "Very tired and worn, with a sort of droop about him I've never seen before. I wanted him to stop quietly here and have a rest and a smoke in my inner room, but he said he had to go off. Can't you persuade him to do less, Miss Scott?"

Tamar shook her head.

"No, I don't think I can," she said dreamily. "He has to be almost feverishly active. You should have seen him in Holland. I thought he was — very wonderful."

"Did you?" Grierson asked, scanning her with stealthy interest. He knew Bramfield's secret.

"Yes," Tamar repeated. "Very wonderful."

Her face lit up with one of her rare, beautiful smiles. She had been fingering a most glorious bit of opal mat-

rix which was lying on the counter. It was of immense size, and she asked about it and learnt that it was from Queensland. It served to stop any further conversation about Bramfield, which was more than she could bear, so great was her longing to see him. She hurried home and wrote this letter:

"BRAMFIELD,

"I ask you to forgive me. I am sorry I insulted you. "T. SCOTT."

She received no answer, and she wrote again:

"I am sure you must know that it was my temper and disappointment that drove me to insult you, and not my conviction. "T. SCOTT."

No answer, and she wrote once more:

"I admit that I deserve all you said to me.

"TAMAR."

Still no reply came, but Tamar would have been comforted if she had known that he smiled lovingly over these brief missives, documentary evidence of her penitence and humbled pride, and kept them in his pocket-book, to be re-read many times during the day. With the arrival of each one his anger abated several degrees, but he was determined to give her a lesson and made no haste to reply. But at last he wrote:

"TAMAR,

"I have received your letters, but have been so rushed that I've not had a chance to answer them. With regard to your amazing insult, I forgive you, if it is of any value to you to have this assurance.

"BRAMFIELD."

When several more days had elapsed and Tamar had received no visit from him, she artfully set about securing a professional interview with him. She had never claimed that she understood diamonds as well as he did, and as some rather fine stones had been brought to her by a lady who wished to sell them and buy War Loan, she wrote and asked him to spare a few minutes and call in for the purpose of helping her to value them.

Then Bramfield behaved in a way entirely different from his usual habit. He sent his manager — a splendid expert — and Tamar knew that. But never once had he only served her indirectly. He had invariably given direct, personal, speedy service. That he should have put her off with his manager, showed her only too clearly that by her own folly she had alienated — and lost him.

After this rebuff she left him alone. She considered she had sacrificed more than enough of her pride, and she could not continue being actively penitent. That was not possible to her. Passively penitent, yes — but not more. But she missed him sorely, was sorry about his anxiety for Bruce, and realized as never before what he was, the scope of his outlook, the range of her unselfishness and kindness. Her own words echoed back to her: "You should have seen him in Holland. I thought him — very wonderful."

She could not bear the sight of any of the Dutch nefs, nor of that reconstructed emerald. They reminded her of her mistaken judgment and her hateful outburst of temper. She felt almost inclined to sell them at once cheaply and thus get rid of them. But saner business instincts prevailed, and she hid them away out of sight, but ready for future favourable opportunity.

But although Tamar was lonely in spirit, her days did not lack events, nor her business clients. She was, in fact, unusually busy, and amongst other things sold some of her best George the Second silver bits, notably a pair of caskets beautifully chased with foliage, and a very fine pilgrim bottle, and a Queen Anne three-handled cup. She parted company also with some of her Spode china, two Battersea enamels and several costly jewels. People apparently had plenty of money to spend on luxuries in spite of the war; but there were, likewise, a great many others who were parting with their possessions to raise money either for themselves or for some purpose in connection with the war. Gold rings and brooches, thick snake bracelets and many hideous and enormous lockets had been unearthed from the recesses of Mid-Victorian cupboards with glass doors. Some of the objects brought to light were extremely interesting, others ugly but valuable, and not a few comparatively worthless. She grunted approval over some, sniffed at others and laughed goodnaturedly at quite a number. But on the whole, considering she was Tamar, she behaved very decently about prices when she learnt that these treasures were being sold to buy War Loan; and in one instance she did an act of generosity in kindest fashion.

This was in the case of an elderly woman, about the same age as Mrs. Thornton, obviously poor, timid and retiring, and quite the last person in the world to enter a shop and offer anything for sale. T. Scott knew types well. She knew that this gentle lady came from a backwater of life, and that only some great need had impelled her to bring her wares to the market. T. Scott looked at the huge and haunting gold brooch,

designed to contain a miniature, surrounded by a twisted pattern — a triumph of clumsy device and workmanship. The gold was not even good. She named a price, a very fair one. But the lady seemed entirely stunned. She turned pale, and her hand trembled. Her voice almost failed her when she attempted to speak.

"Oh," she said, "what a disappointment. I was hoping to send so many parcels of food to my boy who is a prisoner with the Germans."

She made no complaint, urged no concession, but accepted T. Scott's verdict as final, and put the twenty-five shillings in her purse. The money would at least send three parcels to Dülmen in Westphalia. Three parcels were better than nothing.

The dumbness of her despair touched a chord in Tamar's heart. She had heard in Holland something about the sad condition of the British prisoners in Germany.

"Have you nothing else to sell?" she asked.

"Nothing — nothing of any value," the lady said, shaking her head. "I did put a little ring in my pocket — but I am sure you would think it of no value — and perhaps I'll keep it."

"May I see it?" T. Scott asked in her best business tone of voice.

The lady hesitated, as if she could not bear another rebuff, and then handed it to Tamar. It was a poor little trinket, with a garnet of the commonest variety, but Tamar examined it carefully, held it up to the light, turned it over, considered it for some time and appeared to give it all the attention she might have been likely to bestow on a valuable stone. Finally she said:

"Well, now, it is just as well you showed it to me, for it's worth something."

She saw the lady's face light up with hope.

"I can give you — twenty-five pounds for this ring," she said casually.

"You don't really mean it?" exclaimed the lady, her face now transformed with joy.

Tamar nodded.

"It is worth that to me," she said, and she counted out the money.

"Ah, you don't know what this means to me," the lady said excitedly. "Let me show you this postcard I've had from my boy. Just an official postcard from his camp at Dülmen. But look. My name is Page, and my boy's Christian name is Christopher. But do you see what he has signed himself?"

Tamar read the signature aloud:

"*Christopher Starving Page.*"

"I am glad you brought this ring — a beautiful little ring," she said in a low voice.

Then she glanced up and saw Bramfield standing near the door, which he opened for the lady to pass out. He had come in unawares and had witnessed the whole incident.

"Tamar, Tamar," he said, "why do you ever allow yourself to be so hateful, when you can be so dear?"

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN it came to the point of parting with Dorothy, poor Rupert worked himself into a state of great misery and even wrath. He said he hated the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps, and especially the Ambulance Section. Evidently Dorothy didn't love him at all, or else she wouldn't be going off and leaving him in this heartless fashion. Why couldn't she make up her mind to give her work up, stop at home and marry him? It was ridiculous her going back to Yprès. Let other members of the F. A. N. Y. take on her job. She didn't love him. That's what it was.

"It isn't that I don't love you, old thing," she said. "I love you very much, and think you are the greatest darling on earth. But I can't give up my work nor my freedom yet. I really can't. I can't face domestic life and settling down to being your wife first and foremost, and then all my outside life gone, just at a time when one's outside life is so thrilling and interesting, and one's being useful too — and wanted. There now, I've told you the whole thing. And you must either give me up, or give me time. But don't be an idiot and think I don't love you and don't want you. I do love you — and I do want you. But not yet."

They were sitting together on the sofa in the drawing-room in Russell Square, and Rupert put his arms round her and tried to caress and coax her into reversing her decision. He was crying aloud for her, he said, body, soul and spirit, and he could not give her up now,

when they were in measurable reach of the happiness they had been planning, and when his share of the jewels had made it possible for him to marry, and when he had done his bit for the country and could not do any more — at any rate for the present. Her answer was that he had done his bit, but that she hadn't done hers, and that until she had carried out her plans and put in some more months with the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps she could not be any one's bride. She was very dear about it, and looked entirely bewitching and womanly as she stated her case, with her head snuggled up against his neck, and her hand softly stroking his wounded arm. But she was quite firm, and said he must take it as part of the "churn up." It couldn't be helped. No one was to blame — except the statesmen.

Then, when he turned sullen and sulky over the failure of all his pleading and arguing, her answer was, oh, well, if he wanted a girl on the old traditional lines, some one content to sit at his feet and adore him, and wait breathlessly all day until the sound of the garden gate of the suburban villa heralded his arrival home from the City, he'd better go and marry that girl at once and have done with it. He could still find plenty of that type, and of course there were heaps of flappers floating about who would answer the purpose equally well — probably better. He said she knew perfectly well that he didn't want any one of that description, and he would be bored to tears with any one sitting at his feet adoring him, and he didn't want a garden gate or a villa or a suburb — he didn't want anything except her — dashed old ambulance and all, and he supposed it was all part of the "churn up," and he would have to put up with it. Then she said, yes — now he was talk-

ing sense. Then he had another shot at getting his own way and said perhaps she was sick of him because he was wounded and disabled and not in the pink of health, and at that she said, nonsense, that he knew perfectly well that if he were permanently disabled, or blind, or disfigured, or deaf or dumb, or had both his legs off or anything awful, all the Ambulance Corps in the world wouldn't get the glorious chance of her services — they'd be his then — till the end of the chapter. Now didn't he really believe this, silly old thing that he was? Well, perhaps he did. Only perhaps? she asked. Well, perhaps not perhaps. Ah, that was better. Would he give her time, then, instead of giving her up? Of course he couldn't give her up. But couldn't she just go to the registrar or to church or to any old where, and then be off on her own, absolutely free from him until she wished to be claimed by him — so that he might at least have the satisfaction of knowing that he had secured her, and that she belonged to him? No, on the whole, she wasn't willing for that — it wouldn't answer and she wouldn't really feel free. Perhaps then she wouldn't even want to feel free. Ah, so he had got that out of her, had he? Good innings for him, that. Then he launched another attack of coaxing and caressing, but all in vain. The line was impenetrable. Then he was angry over his defeat. Then he was sullen. Then he was penitent. By the time he was penitent, Dorothy had become angry. Finally they were reconciled, were braced up by the encounter and went off together to the theatre.

Rather mournfully Rupert showed his mother the pearl and diamond ring which T. Scott had caused to

be constructed for one of his wedding gifts to his elusive bride, for in his innermost heart he had hoped that Dorothy would give in and marry him. The stones had been very beautifully set by a truly cunning craftsman known to Tamar for many years.

"You keep it for me, Mother," he said dejectedly, "until our wedding does come off — if it ever does. I can't bear the sight of it."

"Of course it will come off," Mrs. Thornton said. "Very hard luck for my poor boy to have to wait, but it will all right itself. I'm sure of that. Dorothy loves you dearly. If you had seen her when the news came of your being wounded — well, I can only say she suffered as much as I did. And I was thankful she was staying with us so that we were able to share our anxiety. Yes, dear, she loves you and will be true to you, I'm sure. And I'm going to say something that may sound strange to you. It is this. If I were Dorothy, I should do just the same, Rupe. I understand it so well. I too should like to be off to the Front driving an ambulance car or doing my part in some way out there. Indeed I should, my dear boy. And if I feel this, what must the young women be feeling? Of course they want to be free. Be patient, dear, and wait. She's worth it."

"Mother, you're an old sport, that's what you are," he said, giving her a hug. And he added half shyly:

"I suppose the reason you feel so strongly about freedom is because you were always chained up?"

Yes, she told him, in a sense she had always felt chained up, and that she, even as many other women of her generation, inarticulate, in a backwater of life, without initiative, and drilled by tradition in an unneces-

sary and unwholesome and very dull sacrifice of self, had nevertheless longed at times to seek a path for herself, but now was at least experiencing the joy, almost the personal triumph, of seeing her own vague dreams realized by this generation of young women.

"Not one word would I say to hinder them," she said, "even though my own darling son would have to suffer. I would rather ask him to help and not to hinder."

"Dear old Mother, I will help," he said. "I'll be as sporting as you are, and Dorothy can put off our marriage for an indefinite number of months, and I swear I won't sulk — much."

"My darling boy," she said, her face lit up with pride and pleasure, "when she's ready for you, she'll find she has got the best man in the whole world."

"I believe I'll go back to Lallington for a bit after she has gone," he said, "and do some fishing and have a shot at some writing, and arrange the Governor's archaeological notes. I should like to try and finish that history of his if I can. And I'll explore the house well. There may be some more precious stones knocking about. And then there are the moors. I long for them at times. London is all very well in its way, but my heart isn't here."

"Nor mine," she confessed. "But I don't want the other children to know. Perhaps I shall slip back there soon. My thoughts wander there constantly, and memories of your father call me."

And then they spoke of him, and dwelt on his well guarded secret. Mrs. Thornton told Rupert that she would always consider that Miss Scott had been sent to her as a messenger of mercy. If she were never to

see her again, never to hear her name mentioned even, that would make no difference.

"She has done for me the biggest thing that one human being can do for another," she said. "She healed a bruised spirit."

And Rupert understood. More than most people he understood the needs of the spirit. He knew of those hidden mysterious sources, from which alone our true life of the spirit springs — secret as a mountain stream working its way to the light. His mother thus was able to unfold her heart to him, and she learnt more than she had ever guessed of the boy's love for his father, who had been almost a stranger to them all. He told her for the first time how he heard his father calling to him in No Man's Land. Never before had they had an intimate talk about him, and they spoke frankly of his complicated character, his amazing aloofness, his long periods of entire indifference to their welfare, his spasmodic concern on their behalf, and his lovableness on the rare occasions when he was reachable.

Outside, the roar of the great city, the turmoil of the world, the warring of the nations, conquests and defeats by land and sea and air, imperishable records of heroism and sacrifice, events of vast import vying with each other in tragedy and significance — and in that quiet room, with the fire dying down unheeded, and the lights unlit, a mother and son in communion with their dead.

Had she perhaps shared her thoughts and memories, her sadness and disappointments, long kept secret, so that her boy might always have the remembrance if he wished, that in an hour of a bitter disappointment, when nothing seemed worth while, his mother opened

a book and turned over with him the pages of a sacred record?

Perhaps this was her reason.

He strolled in the next day to see T. Scott, and took with him the four pearls.

"I had a sort of idea that you would like to buy them now, but didn't care to speak about them," he said, with a smile. "This thought was very persistent in my mind during the night — probably because my mother and I had been talking of my father, and that led one to think of precious stones and you."

"I had been thinking of them and longing for them," she said, her face flushing as she took the lovely sea-gems in her hands. "Last night, as I lay awake, they haunted me — especially this one."

She feasted her eyes on them for a long time in silence, and then, with a sigh, laid them on the counter.

"If I buy them now," she said dreamily, "I shall only sell them again almost at once. Perhaps you'd better sell them direct to Bramfield or some one else."

"But you wanted them frightfully yourself, didn't you?" he asked, astonished.

"Yes, and I want them now," she answered. "I should always want them. I should never be able to forget them, but —"

She broke off. He waited.

"But this does not seem to be the time for adding to a collection," she went on. "At moments — terrible moments, I rather believe it is the time for dispersing a collection."

"Dispersing?" he repeated. "But you'd never be able to do that, would you? I don't believe you'd be

able to do it any more than my father would have been able."

"I don't know," she said, in a low voice. "I don't know."

And she added, with a ghost of a smile on her face:

"If I were able to, it would only be because of the 'churn up.'"

"Look here," he said, smiling at her use of the family word, "if you don't want to buy them now, keep them for a while and enjoy them, and revel in them in your own way, and then sell them for us."

She shook her head.

"It wouldn't be the same thing," she said. "One would have to possess them absolutely, to know they were one's very own. No, you must take them away again. But I shall never forget them. And there is something else I shall never forget — your silence about my temptation and the attempt I made to cheat you of their value. I found out for myself that your mother did not know that. And I was grateful to you. I value your mother's goodwill. I should hate to have to forfeit it."

"You won't ever have to," he assured her. "You might do the most awful deed in the world and it wouldn't make any difference to her real regard for you. And as to my silence, why, that's nothing — my little bit of an offering — something about the size and worth of a tiny seed pearl. That's all."

"But in this case, of a priceless value," she insisted.

But he said that was all nonsense, and swept his little seed pearl deprecatingly away, and told her what the churn up had been doing for him these last days: that Dorothy would not give up her plan of returning to the

Front, but was really off at the end of the week. Then out came all her stores of interest and experiences to help to divert him. She told him secrets of the trade, and taught him the difference between real and reconstructed stones, and the methods of selecting them. She gave him a long discourse on pearls and the precautions to be taken to preserve their beauty, which was not necessarily immutable.

"As you are becoming such an expert from reading my book," she said, smiling, "you must be told things which are not in my book."

Finally, to his immense amusement, and hers too, she left him in charge of the shop whilst she went off on some important business. In her absence he sold two Louis Quartorze snuff-boxes at impiously exorbitant prices, and not by mistake either, but just for fun, to see whether people were really such fools as to pay anything for some objet de vertu to which they happened to have taken a fancy.

"I begin to see," he thought, "how these dealers in antiques are positively encouraged to cheat, like some medical specialists, in fact."

He was wondering who his next customer would be, when Dorothy arrived. She had been to Russell Square, and learning that he had gone to Dean Street, went off to fetch him and found him in possession alone. She poked about and was greatly taken by a particularly beautiful antique round mirror, hanging on the wall.

"I say, old thing, it would be nice to have that for our hall, wouldn't it?" she said. "I think I'll buy it and keep it for 'the home of homes.'"

"Oh, we *are* going to have a home, are we?" he said. "May I ask when and where?"

"Of course we're going to have a home, and a hall," she said. "And that mirror too, if I can get it cheap."

"Nothing cheap here," he answered. "You'll have to pay dear. If you want anything at a low price, you'd better go to another establishment. Besides, you can't have that mirror. It's already sold."

"I don't believe it," she said. "And I'm going to have it. I've taken a fancy to it. Tell me the price, Rupe."

"It's already sold," he persisted. "Somebody else has bought it for his home of homes. You're not the only person in the world who is going to have a home of homes — and a hall."

"Oh, Rupe," she cried, "I believe you've made up your mind to buy it because I expressed the wish. What an old darling you are — and don't ever believe I don't love you fearfully — fearfully."

She bent towards him and he held her in an embrace over the counter.

Later Tamar came and saw them thus. They were entirely unconscious of her arrival. She smiled, and crept by on tiptoe into the kitchen, where Mrs. Bridges was ironing handkerchiefs.

"I peeped in a minute ago and found them two young people love-making over the counter," she said, with a grin on her face. "Something new for the counter, I'm thinking."

"Yes," Tamar said. "Something new for the counter."

"Times is changed here, and no mistake," Mrs. Bridges chuckled.

"Yes, times are changed," Tamar repeated indulgently.

"Yes," continued the old woman, "a fire in the kitchen, more food, milk for every one and the cat, people coming and going. Young things laughing and making you laugh. It's good for you. I'm glad. Ain't you pleased times is changed?"

"Yes," Tamar answered, "perhaps I am."

"Love-making over the counter — that beats me," the old woman chortled. "Something new for that there counter."

Something indeed new for the counter — until now nearly always the scene of hard and ruthless bargaining.

CHAPTER XV

IT was the hour of sunset. There had been a snow-storm in the night, and the fells were still covered with snow which lingered also on the moors, but had vanished from the lower slopes. The bright emerald green of them stood out with added vividness of tone against the white background. The belt of woods, infinitely lovely in fresh May garments, was caught by a shaft of fading sunlight, which for one brief moment held them in a gracious radiance. All around, over the wild moorland, far and near, raced the clouds, iron-grey, dove-coloured, or touched with gold or purple, pale green or delicate rose, snatching from the setting sun any stray jewels of its fading splendour, wearing them in triumph, casting them off in mournful farewell.

Rupert stood on the moor watching the wonder of the scene, and feeling, as he always had felt, a thrill of joy at the sight, the sense of space, at those rolling waves of moors, giving the impression of countless tiers of them, a world made up of them — the only world existing. For a long time he watched the changing splendours, the entrancing and unexpected effects wrought by cloud and wind and light, and only stirred when the growing dimness revealed him the evening star. Then he strolled into the village to buy some tobacco, for he had planned out for himself a long evening in his father's study, with his father's papers, but felt he could not face it without a well-filled tobacco-pouch.

He wished, if he could bring himself to do it, to ask just one question of the old tobacconist, who was an enthusiastic archaeologist and had been Mr. Thornton's one and only intimate in Lallington. If any one knew anything at all about his father, John Grimshaw was the man. And Rupert, since his talk with his mother, had become more than ever interested in his father's character, and longed to know more about the workings of his mind. He wanted help, too, in his self-appointed task of finishing his father's book on archaeology, copious notes for the remainder of which had been left in very concise and methodical form, so as to render the work comparatively easy to any intelligent person who might undertake it. Grimshaw would help, he felt certain, and, failing him, there would be others to whom he could apply if he could not manage alone. Archaeology as a subject was not in his line, but he had a gift for writing and a resourcefulness with his pen which encouraged him to think that he might fit himself in time for a literary career. This belief had grown on him since he had been ill; and during his long months of recovery he had been forging ahead with his efforts, almost in the same furtive way as his father had collected precious stones.

He turned into Grimshaw's shop, bought his tobacco, and then spoke about the unfinished book and his great wish — the wish of the whole family, indeed — to bring it to completion and publish it.

"Yes, it ought to be done," the old man said. "If you thought I could help in any way, of course I would. Much of the exploration round here in these parts we did together, as you know. The very happiest hours of my life, Mr. Rupert, have been spent in your father's

company. I thought I knew something about him. But I evidently did not."

Rupert knew, of course, that Grimshaw was referring to the discovery of the fortune in precious stones, news and details of which had leaked out in that strange way in which secrets, however jealously guarded, become the common property of a village. For a moment he remained silent, his pride battling with his intense desire to question Grimshaw. At last, with great effort, he said:

"Grimshaw, tell me, did he never once speak to you about his collection of precious stones? Did you never have any idea, any vague suspicion from anything that he might have said or done, that he was a passionate lover of them and a secret collector? I could not bring myself to mention the subject to you but that I know, of course, that the strange story is no longer private property. And even now —"

He broke off.

"No, I had no idea," Grimshaw said, shaking his head. "Never a sign nor a word did I have from him. I believed his interest was centred in archaeology. But when I learnt the story of the stones, my mind leapt back to one incident which I had completely forgotten. It was long ago, but it impressed me at the time. It was this. We'd found many interesting things in a barrow on Shackleton Moor. I remember distinctly what they were: bones of an ox and stag, remains of millstones, querns and household implements, and a bone spoon. We had put everything together except the bone spoon, which he dropped and then carried in his pocket. Afterwards, when we were talking about this barrow and its contents, he said: 'Ah, that little bone

spoon. I'd forgotten it.' And he fumbled in his pocket and drew out — to my astonishment — together with the spoon — a jewel — a very beautiful green stone — an emerald, I suppose — very rich in colour — I'd never seen anything of the kind so beautiful. But I only got a glimpse of it, for when he saw what he had done, he whipped it away and looked furious. He was angry with himself and angry with me. I was deeply puzzled at the time. But I understand now that he thought he was betraying his secret."

"Did he ever refer to the incident?" Rupert asked.

"Never," Grimshaw answered. "But he kept away for some time, seemed to take a dislike to me, and went on his excavations alone. Eventually his feeling against me wore off, and we renewed our intercourse as if nothing had happened to interrupt it."

Rupert went home and settled himself in the library, where the caretaker had lit a comforting fire. He had already begun to sort his father's private and personal papers, and to set on one side any important ones for his mother's special consideration. She had entrusted him with the task of burning all her letters to his father if he should find any. He now came across a packet marked "*Letters from my beloved wife.*" He threw it untouched into the fire and watched it crumble into blackened ashes. He found, amongst other things, a volume of his father's journal, and opened it haphazard to see whether it contained any reference, however brief, to his secret passion. Then, still with this idea in his mind, he read on and on, but found not one single sentence which had any bearing on the subject which, as was now known, had greatly engrossed him. The jour-

nal was that of an archaeologist. Perhaps somewhere there might be the journal of a collector of precious stones.

But Rupert found nothing of the sort.

At last he did come across something which repaid him for the effort and the pain and the uneasy shame always felt in handling the private papers of the dead. It was a long, yellow-with-age envelope. He unearthed it from the bottom drawer of his father's desk. He held it in his hand and did not open it. He could not. He put it back where he had found it, determined that he would read no more, intrude no more, probe no more. The pain was too great, the shame was too great. It was taking too great a liberty with the dead, who were not there to protect themselves — taking an unfair advantage of them.

Yet he knew that he was not actuated by a merely prying spirit. He desired earnestly to know something about that father whom, with so little encouragement, he would have dearly loved, had loved, in fact, but in a silence and a reserve which had never been challenged. Nevertheless he desisted, possessed suddenly by the feeling that he had no right to force an access denied to him in life.

Instead, he turned to the impersonal archaeological papers, and began to read carefully one of the chapters on the barrows and enclosures in Westmoreland, which his father had left imperfect so far as the structure and composition were concerned, but with full details and notes on separate little pieces of paper, all carefully numbered and in a handwriting so microscopic as to be almost illegible. Rupert remembered his father had always said that when he was most interested in his sub-

ject, his handwriting became so small that he very often had to use a magnifying glass to be able to read it himself. Here, then, was a case in point. His father must have been acutely interested in those particular barrows. Indeed, the MS. said as much, and recorded a great dispute with other archaeologists, from which Mr. Thornton had evidently emerged victorious and triumphant. Rupert opened the right-hand drawer of his father's desk, took out a magnifying glass he had seen there, and began to decipher and copy out the sentences one by one.

He was so engrossed in his task that he knew nothing about the passage of time, nor of the wind which had sprung up suddenly and was raging wildly on the moor and battling to find an entrance to the house itself. Its angry, tumultuous, imperious voice did not reach him. If he had heard it, he might perhaps have gone out to its summoning. For he loved it, the might of it, the elemental anarchy of it. But for once it failed to claim him. He read on, wrote on, forgot the outside world, his own personal concerns, Dorothy, the war, the Front, his own comrades still serving, his people, his plans, his ambitions — everything.

But suddenly he looked up, as if some one had called his name.

"Yes, Father?" he answered, rising as he spoke. He stood waiting for a time.

"I could have sworn he called me," he said. "I heard his voice as clearly as I heard it in No Man's Land."

He sat down again, but he could not focus his attention on the work. He was listening, on the alert, with an expression on his face of half questioning, half joy-

ful wonder — the exact expression he had worn at those rare times when his father called and wanted him.

Again he heard that voice calling, "Rupert."

Again he answered, rose, and stood waiting. And as he waited — waited for he knew not what — it was gradually borne in on him that what he had got to do, was to examine that yellow-with-age envelope and its contents. Yes, he was being bidden, authorized, to examine it. He had to do it — and at once.

He had left it at the bottom of the drawer with many other papers piled on top of it. He threw them out in haste and possessed himself of it eagerly. He opened it and found inside a large and old sheet of parchment with writing on it. It ran thus:

"December 31st, 1789. My Pact with the Almighty.

"This night, the eve of a New Year, I, George Richard Thornton, make a solemn pact with the Almighty to try and cure myself of my secret covetousness. I swear from this hour onwards to abstain from my secret worship of precious stones, and from my impulse to acquire them. My lust for them is unholy, my thoughts are filled with longing for them when they should instead be filled with aspirations, ambitions, hopes, duties, affections. I feel my character being undermined by their magic influence.

"With God's help, I banish them from my mind and life to-night.

"George Richard Thornton."

In a corner, dated December 31st, 1912, was the following sentence in the cramped handwriting of Rupert's father:

"Oh, my God, my God, have I not felt the same? But I could not keep such a compact. I could not keep it. Did he, I wonder?

"JAMES RICHARD THORNTON."

The paper fell from Rupert's hand. He was stirred to the depths of his heart. This was the first, the only sign they had had of the trend of his father's mind, other than what T. Scott had been able to suggest to them from her own personal experience. Not a single entry in the diary, not a bare reference to any precious stone — but here, in the shelter of the old family paper, a confession of his passion, a confession of his struggle, an admission that he knew whither his weakness was leading him, a recorded regret that he had failed and would ever fail to overcome it — and by seeking the shelter of the old family paper, surely a plea, a hope for merciful judgment, for that large forgiveness born of understanding.

That was how Rupert interpreted his father's meaning. This passion was in the family, an inheritance for which he had not been responsible, and by inference he asked them to deal gently with his memory. In the family, was it? Well, he himself, Rupert, had certainly not inherited it, but perhaps his son or his daughter would — Dorothy's son or daughter. It would work its way out later, even as music or painting, or literature, or drink, or science, or great powers of organization, or any accentuated tendency. How mysterious and how wonderful. How wonderful life was — and death, how still more wonderful.

Death. It did not seem to him that death separated human beings. No, rather it was a bridge of communi-

cation between them, of surer, stronger structure than any afforded by life. His father and himself, for instance. In life he had never found any means of access to his father, and now in death they were in touch, in direct relationship with each other, not through any intermediary, not by any elaborate and wearisome "spirit summoning," but by direct approach from opposite sides of the bridge. And not for the exchange of trivialities, but for an intercommunion with meaning in it, uplifting, stimulating like the air on the moors.

Death — that passing into the unknown made falsely tragic through the long centuries by ordinances of priests and songs of poets. And now, at all the fronts, young, strong men dying in their thousands and tens of thousands, swept off the face of the earth, and meeting their new fate with gallant unconcern and generous giving. Perhaps, for all one knew, all those thousands of young, strong boys were being sacrificed not only for the cause they fought for, but for the far larger and infinitely more spiritual purpose of bringing home to the whole world the unimportance of death. And if we of the West, backward in the lesson, had learnt that at last, then in very truth something would have been saved out of the wreck, something gained out of the slaughter, the murder, the misery, the ruthless loss of life.

These thoughts passed swiftly through Rupert's mind as he held the family document in his hand. Then he replaced it in its envelope, and put it in his breast pocket. It was a treasure to him, and he knew well that it would be a treasure to his mother, infinitely more precious than the choicest gem stone.

And then, his tension over, his detachment ended, he became aware of the storm.

It summoned him, urging him to free himself from all oppressive thought and come forth to meet and greet it. He went. The wind made a furious onslaught on him, but he battled with it and pursued his way over the moor, uplifted, not oppressed by the physical effort, rejoicing in and not dismayed by the thousand voices of the turbulent night.

Rupert did not write home of the discovery he had made. He preferred to wait until he could tell his mother himself and put into her hands the old family paper, made sacred by his father's words. Together they would be able to speak with reverent realization of the struggle of his soul laid bare, his recorded failure, his appeal for merciful interpretation.

Not again did he hear his father's voice calling his name as he worked in the library at the archaeological chapters, or at his own literary ventures. At times he was depressed by Dorothy's absence, and on these occasions wrote her screeds of reproach which he afterwards destroyed. He sent her instead loving little letters, and said he was waiting patiently for the home of homes, but, all the same, he was not exactly blessing the First Aid Yeomanry Corps.

"But I'm very proud of my girl," he added more than once, "and I try to remember the 'churn up.'"

He shot over the moors with some friends of his who came from Westmoreland, golfed a little with others, and played a game of billiards now and again at the Station Hotel. One of his comrades, disabled, like himself, in the war — and badly needing a good dose of bracing air — stayed with him, and together with him roamed the country, a lover of Nature, like himself, and an

enthusiastic botanist, interested also in the legends of all the different counties, and especially in those of Yorkshire.

Even as Rupert, he was glad and proud to have done his bit for his country, and thankful without any pretence to be released by circumstances from further fighting claims. He hated the whole business of fighting. His outlook and Rupert's was that of many of the gallant young fellows who came forward in those early days, in the hour of their country's need. They were not necessarily warriors by nature and inclination, nor inspired by love of adventure and excitement. Duty impelled them, and they gave their bodies to be sacrificed — but something more too, no record of which is ever found in the annals of honour — they gave their spirits to be lacerated, and received wounds grievous, though invisible, not easily healed, if, indeed, ever.

Rupert's friend was one of these.

But he found balm in the quiet countryside scenes, the sheep passing along the road to change of pasture, the cows slowly wending their way home in a long, thin, straggling line, the beautiful old grey homesteads and halls, with their mullioned windows and stone lintels: in the wonderful moors, changing their aspect in response to cloud and light and wind, in the hollows of the clustering hills, in the emerald uplands, in the walks over fell and dale or through woods or by the rushing glacier-cold river.

Thoughts of the war receded, as Nature, ever healing and beneficent, pressed her claims with tender insistence and offered her ministration.

PART II

CHAPTER I

PEOPLE had given up specluating when the war would be over. The war had evidently come to stay. Prophets of the early days beat a judicious retreat in their mantles to Heaven, or elsewhere. Battles were being lost and won. Statesmen fell from power, rose to power. The agony of Belgium was shown to have been only the beginning of the tragedies awaiting the small nations, and the whole world was gradually becoming involved in a struggle, the magnitude of which made all former wars appear in comparison like child's play. The manhood of the belligerent countries was being cut down in tens of thousands. Invention and scientific research were being pressed into the service of destruction. Every effort had to be met by counter effort, and by changes in outlook and custom and tradition which would not have been thought possible in England at the outset of the war.

Yet the changes had to come, the slacking had to begin to die its slow death, and the irresponsibility of politicians and public had to be replaced by wide vision and intimate concern, if the British Empire was to hold its own against the increasing menace to its existence. The only thing in England which did not need to be changed was the temper of the men who went out to France, and later to Gallipoli and Mesopotamia and Salonika and Palestine. Splendid they went. Splendid they remained. Those who followed to fill their empty ranks, carried on this unchanging record of courage,

devotion and endurance, together with the men of the Navy, the merchantmen, the mine-sweepers, the submarines and the airmen, those amazing boys who seemed to have sprung up ready and equipped for service, even as Athene from Zeus's head, with a mighty war shout and in full armour. And should not we add to the list the gallant nurses in the hospital ships passing permanently backwards and forwards in the danger zones?

Perhaps the greatest changes in what the Thornton children called the "churn up" was the gradual participation of women in the conduct of the war. At the beginning, thousands of women volunteered their services and had been snuffed out with promptness and something approaching contempt. They were told to go back to their proper place, their homes. Later, it was intimated to them that perhaps their proper place was not their home, but aeroplane and munition factories, motor omnibuses, railway stations, canteens, the War Office, the Censor's office, the Admiralty, the Front, anywhere and everywhere except the best-paid positions. But this great change born of necessity, was to have far-reaching consequences. If politicians could have staved it off, they probably would have done so. But they were powerless. The war could not be carried on without the women's help, and the women were willing enough, given the opportunity.

Many had already gone abroad to give our Allies the services which had been rejected by their own country. But now England decided that she could not do without them, much to the disgust of various old military "dug-outs" like Mrs. Thornton's brother, and, indeed, numberless other reactionaries in civil life who had not even the distinction of being "dug out," but had remained

firmly embedded like fossils in the deposit of aeons of tradition. Choleric old gentlemen, mid-Victorian ladies, selfish parents formed this feeble and futile battalion. Like many another battalion, it was doomed to be wiped out, no reserve forces coming up in time to lend it succour.

It was visiting day in the St. Ursula Military Hospital, a cold, wet day in August. In Ward Z, where Marion Thornton worked as a nursing orderly, most of the patients had their relations or friends at their bedsides, and parcels of gifts of various kinds on their lockers. Mothers and wives and sweethearts and sisters, fathers and brothers, some in khaki, some in plain clothes with the silver badge of services rendered and ended, made a brave show of family life, to which a few wee babes contributed a not always silent share.

The Sister in Charge was off duty, the nurses were having a cup of tea behind the screen near the fireplace, official life was for the moment suspended whilst the visitors were in possession of the fort.

But there were, of course, always some men who had no callers, men whose homes were in Scotland, or Cornwall, or in any remote part of the United Kingdom; for the mysterious methods of that amazing institution, the War Office, secured the results that Private A. Jones, of Edinburgh, or Glasgow, or Land's End, or Durham, or Cardiff, would be landed in a London hospital, and Private B. Smith of London would find himself in Edinburgh, or Glasgow or Land's End, or Durham, or Cardiff. The men accepted this strange dispensation with the same stoicism, good-nature and cheerfulness with which they met every contingency born of the war.

"At least we're back in old Blighty," they said. "But the War Office has got funny ways — and no mistake."

Forty-six beds, in three long rows, stretching from the staircase door to the exit by the lift. Fractured femurs, wounded arms, amputated legs, amputated arms, injured spines, trench feet, shrapnel in the face, broken jaws, blinded eyes, burnt and bandaged heads, burnt hands, paralysed hands, gas suffocation, poisonous wounds which will not heal, operations which have to be repeated time after time, suffering, sleeplessness, restlessness — and yet the dominant note of the atmosphere a patience almost divine and a cheerfulness and courage indescribable. The courage of the battlefield whilst doing more than their part there. The courage of the hospital ward in continuance of that record of heroism. And kindness to each other, unselfishness, generosity, willingness to share everything — cigarettes, the last shred of tobacco, visitors, however dear — and something still more precious and priceless — the last match!

No grumblings, then, no grousing at all? Oh, yes, a little, of course. Always two or three in a ward to undertake that necessary and healthy office. Good for the tone of the ward, too, makes the Sister sit up, the nurses sit up, the doctors sit up, the masseuses, the librarians, the chaplain, the entertainment organizer, the needlework orderly, the pay office orderly, and all the powers that be. But extraordinarily little of it — that's the wonder — and in perfect unison all the trades, occupations, professions and businesses work together to suppress it.

Miners, butchers, grocers, clerks, railwaymen, tin-

platers, wheelwrights, drapers, public librarians, printers, bookbinders, piano makers, carpenters, divers, fish-curers, engineers, motor drivers, electricians, builders, land labourers, dairymen, university men, secondary teachers, compositors, estate agents, telegraphists, wireless operators, telephonists, shipwrights, actors, boxers, organists, commercial travellers — all closely united in a silent, unconscious conspiracy to make the ward as cheery as possible and snuff out anything in the nature of acute grousing. Every kind of temperament, every kind of outlook or none, every kind of character: rough dispositions, gentle ones, tough ones, surly, sulky, joyous, silent, reserved, proud, somewhat haughty, a bit patronizing, a bit aloof, devil-me-care, reflective, introspective, self-centred, a little bitter, a little angry, warm-hearted, gracious of spirit, radiating charm and courtesy — and all conspirators in the cause of the ward.

All of them, or nearly all of them — the exceptions being so few as to be negligible — in league to lessen the anxiety of their dear ones at home, whether in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Buenos Ayres, Liverpool, Exeter, Glasgow, Coventry, Deal, or anywhere. One man dying almost and yet whispering:

"Tell them I'm all right. Shall soon be better. Tell them not to worry."

Operation after operation, and always the same report:

"Tell them I'm jumping."

Or, if able to write themselves:

"Hoping this finds you in the best of pink, as it leaves me."

Animosity to the enemy? Not much, if at all. Mr.

Fritz dead, or at a distance, becomes a blighter who couldn't help himself more than Tommy could.

Strange and wonderful creatures, unconscious teachers, acting not preaching patience, endurance, cheerfulness, kindness, unselfishness, sweetness, charged with a spiritual message to all who come in contact with them day after day, to make the best of everything, every circumstance, however uncompromising, every disability, however appalling.

"Nurse," called out one of the patients in a bed not far off from the screen behind which the nurses were having their little bit of off-time and their cup of tea.

Marion Thornton emerged immediately and went to Private Seymour's bed. He was a fractured femur case, and he was swung up on a mysterious structure attached to the bed, which, to a lay mind, had the appearance of some sort of compromise between a family poster bed with weights attached and a devilish torture contrivance borrowed from the Inquisition. His head was low, and his legs, spread out, were high up. Yet he was fairly comfortable, now accustomed to the position; and his reward would probably be, that his injured thigh and leg would be stretched out almost to the normal, and that when he was finally rescued from his endurance and on his feet again, he would not be a helpless cripple with easy locomotion hopelessly gone for ever.

"Nurse," he said, "I'm parched with thirst."

"All right, Seymour," she said, "I'll bring you a drink." When she brought it, he said:

"That friend of yours hasn't come."

"Oh, she'll come," Marion answered. "It's early yet, only half-past two."

But, as she went away, she thought:

"She promised faithfully to come today. Weeks and weeks I've been at her. Again and again I've told her that Seymour is lonely and never has any visitors. Surely she won't fail now that she has promised at last."

For Marion had left Tamar no peace about this wounded man who had no friends to visit him, and who lay silent and rather morose day after day, and had never shown any interest in anything until that one memorable afternoon when a book on the subject of precious stones had by chance strayed his way. Time after time Marion had dashed into the shop in Dean Street and said:

"Now, Miss Scott, won't you come this week? Do, there's a dear. Seymour does so want to have a talk with you about rubies and pearls, and all the wonderful things you know. I do want you to come. I do think you might."

"Some day, perhaps," Tamar always said vaguely. "There's plenty of time, as you say he is likely to be in hospital for months. Not this week."

The truth was that Tamar dreaded the sight of illness. It was not that she was not mildly interested in Marion's hospital. She had had to listen to so many accounts of it from Marion, that she knew it by heart. She never discouraged the girl, of whom she had become fond. She loved her eagerness and her impulsive ways, her enthusiasm for her work and devotion to duty. She would have done a good deal for Marion, but she could not brace herself up to go and see the wounded soldiers. Marion got tobacco out of her and a liberal supply of "Woodbines," numberless boxes of matches, now and again some fruit, and constantly chocolates.

The process of obtaining these bounties was always the same.

"Our men like chocolates," Marion said with a bright smile.

"Oh, do they?" said Tamar dryly, as if the matter did not concern her at all. Then a day or two would elapse and the chocolates came.

"Our boys can't have enough 'Woodbines,'" said Marion. "They do smoke them quickly."

"Indeed," said Tamar mechanically.

Then three or four days would elapse and the "Woodbines" arrived.

"Our boys love fruit," said Marion. "It does them no end of good."

"Indeed," remarked Tamar with apparent indifference.

Then perhaps a week would go by and the fruit arrived.

"Our ward is badly off for gramophone records," said Marion, who grew bolder in her demands.

"Horrible things," Tamar said severely. "They ought to be forbidden by Act of Parliament."

Then another week, perhaps two weeks, would pass, and the horrible things arrived.

But when it came to the question of visiting the hospital, Tamar held out stubbornly, until at length she was obliged to succumb to Marion's insistence and name the actual day. Up to this she had parried all the attacks made on her unwillingness on the many occasions when Marion visited her; for the St. Ursula Hospital was only a step from Dean Street, and as Mrs. Thornton had truly said, the Thornton children appeared to think it was their right to run in whenever they wished.

Tamar shared their views, and poured out many a cup of tea for Marion in the inner room. Once or twice she even brought one of the other orderlies from the hospital, a girl with a mass of red hair and eyes as blue as the most beautiful specimen of aquamarine, and as dashing and upspringing as Marion herself. Wasn't this too much of a good thing, Mrs. Thornton had asked, when she had heard of the visitation? No, Tamar had given it to be understood that she liked these surprises from the young people, and that there would always be tea served in Marion's special Crown Derby cups, and always a welcome.

And now, at the moment when Marion was wondering whether she were going to keep her promise, she had dutifully arrived at the hospital, presented her permit at the Transport Office at the gate, and been told where to go. She crossed the courtyard, and suddenly a bell rang, and as suddenly young women from all quarters ran into the courtyard and lined up in front of a Sergeant-Major. A girl carrying a basket of books, and with an armlet marked "*Library*," said to Tamar:

"You'd better step in here. A convoy is coming, and no one is supposed to be in the courtyard. Where do you want to go?"

Tamar showed the permit.

"West Block, opposite," the girl said. "This is the East. But if you wait here, you'll see the convoy come in. It's very interesting. Then you can cross afterwards."

Tamar nodded assent. She was rather quelled and bewildered. She would have agreed to anything suggested, and above all to a suggestion that she should

depart instantly. She had not expected to see such a big building; and all the blocks and rows of windows, and the thought that hundreds of wounded must be lying in those huge wards, suffering and mutilated, appalled her. And now she was going to see some of the men coming straight from the trenches. Her heart beat. For the first time she was face to face with the consequences of the war in England. Another bell. The convoy had arrived. Two women in the uniform of the hospital, but with red collars instead of the blue she knew now so well, emerged from the main office, the taller of the two holding a list in her hands.

"Our C. O. and our Surgeon-in-Chief," explained the orderly.

Tamar nodded again. She knew them to be doctors, for she had been well drilled by her tyrant. Her interest was now getting the better of her apprehension.

Then in glided four large grey ambulances marked *Red Cross*. Out of them in succession were lifted the stretchers, with their wounded freight, and laid on the ground. At once, at a sign from the Sergeant-Major, two girls stepped out from the line, and with an ease and agility which astonished Tamar, bore the soldier to the lift, directions as to his destination being given by the C. O. from her list. This process was repeated with four more ambulances, and yet another four, until all the wounded had disappeared and all the orderlies. The quickness, efficiency and care filled Tamar with admiration, and her heart was touched by pity and concern as she looked upon the wounded men fresh from the trenches, most of them in acute pain and exhausted from all they had been through at the front and from

the journey, and yet with an expression of relief and gladness on their faces at being once more safely home in old Blighty. They lay so still in their stretchers, some of them clasping the flowers which had been showered on them at the station, symbols of welcome, of gratitude, of admiration, of sympathy.

A mist rose before Tamar's eyes.

The orderlies returned with empty stretchers. The ambulances dashed off. The Doctors vanished. The Sergeant-Major dismissed his stretcher-bearers. People began crossing the courtyard again. Tamar, conducted by the library orderly, who said she was going to the same ward, crossed too, mounted the stone stairs, and, after two or three flights, arrived at Ward Z. She paused outside. She suddenly felt nervous, worried, reluctant to face the sights she dreaded.

"I have never been in a hospital ward," she said. "I don't know whether I can go in."

The girl glanced at her in surprise.

"Can't you?" she asked. "Oh, yes, I think you can. You'll find all the men very cheerful. In fact, if one wants to be cheered and heartened in these days, all one has to do is to go into a ward. At least that has been my experience. Whom do you want to see?"

The girl's face lit up when she read the name of Seymour on Tamar's admission paper.

"Seymour," she said eagerly. "I am glad. He's the man who only cares to read about jewels. Are you by any chance the lady whom Nurse Thornton is always speaking of, some one who knows all about precious stones and could make Seymour very happy? Oh, do say you are. We all want to buck him up, and he doesn't care about ordinary things."

"Yes, I am Nurse Thornton's friend," Tamar said, smiling at her eagerness.

There was no chance of lingering when this fact was known. Tamar was bundled into the ward, hurried up to the screen and before she knew where she was, taken possession of by Marion, who held on to her fast as if to prevent any possibility of escape.

Marion wore no nurse's cap, being a nursing orderly. She had a white overall over her uniform, and looked very responsible and business-like.

"You are a brick to come," she said. "You don't mind much, do you?"

"I don't mind so much now I have come," Tamar answered. "But I rather dreaded it. I believe I should have bolted at the door but for that girl with the books. She hustled me in when she knew who I was."

Marion laughed.

"She would, of course," she said. "She knows I wanted you to come. Well, I forgive you now, but you've been a wicked woman to delay so long."

"I've brought some of my best stones for him to see," Tamar said penitently.

Marion gave her a dig of approval and led her right down the ward. None of the men took any notice of her, most of them being occupied with their visitors. And when she stood before Seymour's bed she forgot her fears entirely, a great compassion taking the place of her former reluctance. So this was the soldier she had so often refused to come and see, this man wounded grievously at Festubert, and now enduring patiently his martyrdom of recovery. He had wanted to talk with her, had looked forward to discuss with her the one subject on which he was really keen, and revived interest in

which would have cheered him and helped his recovery, and she had persistently refused to come; and then, when she had been forced by Marion to promise, she had put off the evil hour and made every excuse simply because she could not bring herself to take the trouble on behalf of a stranger — or to face illness. What a brute she had been, what a selfish beast. This man had been wounded for her — that was what it came to — and she had not been willing to do a little service for him, to make a little sacrifice of time and sensitiveness to give him pleasure. Well, she would retrieve now.

She did retrieve. She brushed aside with a supreme effort all her unwillingness, all her natural unease in the presence of sickness. She forgot herself. She tided over the man's shyness and somewhat sulky reserve. She claimed him as a comrade, an ally, a fellow lover of precious stones, a sharer in that strange passion for their magic beauty, understood only by those touched by their mysterious influence. Out of her breast she drew a small packet, and from this packet she took one of her finest rubies, one of her choicest emeralds, one of her rarest sapphires, of cornflower colour and of peerless lustre, and one or two of her loveliest pearls. Seymour's face lit up and his eyes feasted on them as he fingered them, as he listened to the comments on their characteristics from lips that praised and explained them with intense enthusiasm. She had brought her own book on precious stones, and she showed him the glorious plates, discussed knotty points with him, talked about the various methods of cutting and mounting gemstones, told him some of the stories and traditions in connection with them, and poured out all her rich stores of knowledge and interest for his benefit. Out of the

satchel she produced other stones, less valuable, but all exceedingly beautiful specimens, amongst them two opals, one an Australian opal with flashes and spangles of heliotrope and moss-green colouring, and the other flame-red and brilliant green — both of them entrancing enough to make an enthusiast almost weep from joy and wonder.

Seymour was one of those not only wounded in the flesh, but in the spirit. The horrors of war had numbed him. He had lain for two days, grievously wounded and unfound amongst a number of dead comrades, himself longing for release and death which did not come. The memory of that awful time still haunted him, and he had not been able to dispel it successfully as many other men who had been through the same appalling experience, seen their friends shattered, blown to fragments, and survived alone, cut off, hemmed in, undiscovered. Like Rupert Thornton's friend, like Rupert Thornton himself, everything in his natural disposition was averse to war, and though he had done his part willingly and gallantly, and had been mentioned in Dispatches for a special act of heroism and resourcefulness, he was paying the double price of physical and spiritual injuries. They were healing his body in hospital; but Seymour's real self, the self that did not show, that gave no sign, no response and yet counted more than anything, remained out of their reach, out of their ken.

But Tamar reached it. A miracle took place. The man came back to life again. He forgot the war, forgot himself. His interest was reawakened. His imagination was stimulated. Apathy and indifference fell from him as a mask. He told her he had always been interested in mineralogy, and had spent many an hour

in the Jermyn Street Museum, and there and elsewhere learnt to love precious stones, and to gather a little knowledge about them — not much, but enough to make him desire to know more. Tamar listened and nodded and approved, and smiled with pleasure. Here was a true comrade in spirit. And in that brief hour, there sprang up a freemasonry between them possible only to those who care passionately for the same thing, old violins, rare old illuminated manuscripts, precious stones, Nature in all her manifestations, music in all her manifold voices, art in her many wondrous expressions, old buildings majestic in form and tradition, the setting of the sun, the rising of the moon — all things which stand for more than meets the eye.

The bell rang. The visitors stood up. Their time was over.

"You'll come again," Seymour said, as Tamar also rose to go. "I've lots more to ask you."

"Yes, I'll come again," she answered. "And I'll bring some more stones with me."

"You're not going to take that book away?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no," she said, smiling. "I'm leaving that with you for a week or two."

He thanked her for her visit. He said it had done him ever so much good to have this talk with her, and he told her he should study her book and read every word.

Marion dashed at her as she passed down the ward.

"I've just glanced at Seymour," she said. "I should scarcely have known him. What have you been doing to him, you wonderful person? Sister will be pleased when she comes on duty. I'll take you downstairs. I

have to go to the dispensary. What a pity it's a cold day. If it had been fine, you would have seen the courtyard crowded with beds. Such a nice sight. Never mind. Perhaps it will be fine when you come next week. You are coming next week, aren't you? Promise."

Tamar did not answer. Her concentration over, she was feeling bewildered again. The row of beds with their wounded occupants struck her with renewed awe and anxiety and with a sudden panic of realization that this was what war meant — broken lives, helpless victims, long drawn-out suffering.

An impulse to cover her eyes, to run away so that she might see no more. An impulse to shout. Then an impulse of another kind — an impulse to make sure that those precious stones were safe in her breast. A sudden apprehension lest any harm should befall that beautiful book she had rashly left behind. The end of the ward reached. Relief. Yet elation and gladness that she had done a real little bit of personal service. The stone stairs again. Men with wounded arms going down to see their visitors off. Others coming up, having already said their good-byes. A blinded soldier being led by a one-armed pal. A very young boy and his sweetheart finishing up their love-making in a dark corner in the basement. Then the courtyard once more. Marion's voice directing attention to the dispensary and the chief compounder and her orderlies who were carrying off a cylinder of oxygen. And adjoining this department, the bacteriologist's headquarters, and inside a Doctor recognizable by her red collar, with eyes glued to a microscope. The Quarter-Master hurrying across the courtyard pre-occupied with some problem concerning food or kits. Sisters returning to

their duties, so faithfully discharged and with a devotion no words could describe. The Matron, calm and steady, on her way to the wards, followed by her white dog, speaking to the head masseuse armed with her radiant heat apparatus. The C. O. and Surgeon-in-Chief on the steps of the main entrance, in close consultation, supported by a black Aberdeen terrier and a white one. The entertainment organizer with her blue armlet marking her official capacity, fixing up a notice of a special concert on the board under the C. O.'s office window. The Chaplain coming back with a party of men. A librarian carrying a large packet of Nat Gould's novels, with the same anxious care that T. Scott would have bestowed on a consignment of Burmah rubies. Four or five beds of wounded men in the corner of the courtyard facing the Quarter-Master's offices. A Sister stopping to ask Corporal Reeves whether he had had enough of the cold wind and would like to go back to his ward? A London County Council ambulance suddenly arriving. A convoy? No, not a convoy this time. Perhaps a "drunk" or some one taken ill on leave. And now the transport office again, with one of the orderlies telephoning, and the transport officer herself interviewing some angry relative who has come on the wrong day to the wrong hospital to see his wrong son.

"But I'm telling you it isn't the right hospital," she repeats patiently enough, considering she has made the remark ten times over.

"Then it ought to be," he exclaims with added indignation.

The pink permit given up. The glimpse at the everyday life of the St. Ursula Military Hospital over. Outside the gates once more.

The ordeal dreaded and postponed so often safely passed through.

In the inner room that evening, Tamar, as she put back her precious stones into the safe and chose a few others for her next visit to the hospital, reviewed her experiences and impressions of the afternoon. The memory of Seymour's pleasure filled her with satisfaction in having been able to render to one needing it, a little bit of personal service, something which called for the best output of which she was capable and as such, was finer than any mere gift of money. It was her first actual personal service in the war. It is true, she had been sending off cheques increasingly, sometimes to Gertrude Linton for her refugees in Holland, sometimes to various war committees in England. At first she only wanted to ease her conscience; but as time went on, other and better impulses guided her action. But to-night, as she recalled the vision of that ward full of wounded and broken soldiers, symbolic to her of all the thousands and tens of thousands of men sacrificed for England's sake — for her sake, she saw it clearly for the first time that our debts to them could not be discharged by money only. Money was necessary, and would have to be sent in all directions to help to meet the increasing demands. But however big the cheques, however frequent their dispatch, they could not exonerate the senders from failing to give service, personal service of some kind, at some period.

No, one had in addition to give one's strength, one's time, one's kindness, one's tenderness, one's skill, one's compassion, as those women were doing whom she had seen this day. So this was what women were doing, not

there only, but everywhere. She had heard vaguely of the part women were already taking in the war, and had learnt, of course, a few definite details of the changes going on from Winifred, and Marion and Dorothy, but she had not really progressed much further than a personal, individual interest in these few isolated people with whom she had been brought in actual contact. Yet, considering she was Tamar, this had been a decided advance. But today had come the great push, today a larger grasp of events, today a wider outlook, a revelation of facts and duties and claims, and a realization of the joy in answering their call.

She was still under the influence of these thoughts and touched to her heart's core with the scenes of suffering she had witnessed, when Bramfield came, bowed with grief at the news that his boy Bruce was wounded and a prisoner of the Germans at Döberitz. His face was ashen, his eyes looked dazed, all his vitality seemed to have gone. He sat huddled up, half shivering, and murmuring:

"I don't know how to bear it — I don't know how to bear it — my beautiful boy — wounded — that's bad enough — but taken prisoner of the Germans — at Hooge — at the mercy of those brutes — I don't know how to bear it, Tamar."

It was more than she could stand to see him in this condition of misery and despair. She had all along been most kind and tender to Bramfield about his continuous anxiety regarding Bruce, and now that this definite bad news had reached him, an impulse of love, of pity, of protection swept through her.

He had brought his trouble direct to her, and she

would not fail him, did not wish to fail him. She knelt by his side, gathered him to her arms, laid his head on her breast, stroked his hair, fondled him, comforted him.

"We will bear it together, you and I," she said.

"Tamar, Tamar," he cried, as his lips sought hers.

CHAPTER II

SO in Bramfield's hour of bitter trial he had won Tamar. Whether he could keep her was another matter. He knew that. But meantime he was uplifted, grateful beyond words, filled with love and tenderness for her, and strengthened to meet and bear his trouble by the knowledge that he was no longer alone; that she, so long yearned for, was going to be his at last, and would share with him everything that life might now bring, hopes and joys and fears and plans and daily events. But for the thought of that wounded prisoner in Döberitz, Bramfield would have been the happiest, proudest man in the British Empire.

And Tamar? Tamar was uplifted, too, a little frightened perhaps that she was parting with her liberty, that she had let herself go, but glad she had broken down the barrier raised by herself all these years and reached that haven of love and kindness which had been waiting for her to possess in full entirety. She knew she could never love Bramfield as he loved her. She had not it in her to do so. She made no pretence to him about it. But she did say at last that she wanted him; that during the time when he had punished her for her hatefulness by absenting himself and avoiding her, as she had indeed deserved, she had learnt that she could not do without him, and that life without him was unbearable, unthinkable, and that her love and admiration for him had grown by more intimate knowledge of his life and character.

"I'm not worthy of you, Bramfield," she said. "That's quite evident. You're great-hearted and generous, and I'm mean and avaricious and grasping. But you know all that."

"I know that you make great efforts with yourself and successful ones, my Tamar," he said gently. "As for my virtues, well, I think you must be mistaking me for one of your favourite stones — your best pigeon-blood ruby."

"No," she said, half wistfully. "Not that. I only wish I could love you as passionately as I do my favourite ruby. But I never could, Bramfield; indeed, I couldn't."

"I couldn't expect such a miracle," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "I should be a fool. But perhaps you might manage to put me on a level with a humble garnet. That would be better than nothing."

She laughed her soft little laugh and caressed his hand which was resting in hers.

"How very beautiful you look, my Tamar," he said. "How very beautiful when you are good and happy."

She blushed and looked still more beautiful.

"Well, one thing is very certain," she said. "I sha'n't always be good and happy, and therefore not always beautiful."

"No, of course not," he answered. "But always dear to me, whatever you are. And now what about an engagement ring? No use giving you anything with a stone in it. You would only criticize it and want to quarrel about its lustre or weight. I know you. But here's a ring made at the front from a German bullet and sent me by Bruce. I prize it very much. Do you think you could wear it to please me?"

Tamar nodded and slipped it on her finger without a word.

"He was always wanting us to be married," Bramfield went on. "He was always saying, 'Why don't you make that wretched woman buck up?'"

"Well, that wretched woman has bucked up," Tamar said with a smile.

"Yes, and because of him," Bramfield answered. "I'm glad it is because of him."

"No, it isn't altogether," she said. "A change came over me when you abandoned me, Bramfield. And I don't mind telling you that when I saw Rupert Thornton and his girl love-making over the counter in the shop, a great yearning for you came over me. I remembered how often you had stood on that very spot wooing me, and how often I had repulsed you. And I said to myself: 'Those young people are having their love scene, but I also could have had my love scene here if I had chosen.' I was glad for their sakes — and yet jealous. I felt so old that night, so lonely. They seemed so full of life and love and untouched by desolation."

She paused a moment and then went on:

"In the old days which seem so far off and yet are, as it were, only yesterday, when I had an attack of desolation, all I had to do was to take out my best treasures from the safe. That doesn't help me now in the same way. It didn't that night."

"That's a big confession, my Tamar," he said. "It gladdens and surprises me."

"It could not surprise you more than it surprises me," she said, half dreamily. "I always thought I should go on all my life caring more for precious stones

than for anything else on earth. But something in me has changed, or is changing. Some tense grip on me is being loosened. I don't mean to say that it doesn't tighten up again. It does. But it isn't stable as it used to be. And sometimes I am afraid, uneasy, worried, too, at losing my bearings and parting with some of my traditions. I see my mother sometimes in my dreams, not always comforting as in the past, but menacing, disapproving, disappointed. You know, she herself cared so passionately for jewels, and instilled her passion into me and left it there almost as a trust. Any weakening of it seems a treachery to her memory, which she has a right to resent."

"The dead have no right to stand in our path," Bramfield said. "They have forged their way through. We have to forge ours with the help that life affords. If they cannot help us — and they mostly can, Tamar — then at least they must not be allowed to hinder us. But you are thinking of your mother as you knew her here, in this very shop, in the same set of circumstances — angry, perhaps, if she had done a bad deal, impatient if you had not set a proper value on a rare stone, or if you had sold a perfect pearl which her heart hungered to keep. But how would it be if you thought of her in other terms, as one with a larger knowledge of values and a truer, finer sense of proportion? Then perhaps her face would never seem menacing in your dreams of her, and her voice might be wafted to you, saying: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through

nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' "

Tamar wept. It was Bramfield's turn to take her in his arms and comfort her.

The first thing they did together was to send off a parcel to that prisoner at Döberitz, and for this purpose they went to one of the offices of the Prisoners of War Relief Committee, and learnt what chances there were of any packages or communications reaching him from England. But Bramfield's principal hope was in Gertrude Linton in Holland, who had always many ways and means of overcoming obstacles. If it had not been likely that she was soon coming to England, he would have dashed over to Rotterdam then and there. He did propose to Tamar that they should both go, but she did not encourage this plan, not having acquired the habit of doing anything at a moment's notice. But one thing she did do quickly, and that was to possess herself of the names of two prisoners belonging to Bruce's regiment who had no friends to send them parcels. For Bramfield's trouble about his son had brought back to her remembrance that interview with the sad, anxious mother who had come to her shop and shown her the postcard signed "*Christopher Starving Page.*" Here was her opportunity to step into a breach.

The grand personage seated at the table, who met her inquiries with a metallic condescension, nearly put her off.

"Wait till she comes to me to sell her earrings, and then I'll let her have it," thought Tamar grimly.

Mercifully for the two prisoners, the competent secretary who was the real worker behind the grand per-

sonage who got the kudos, arrived on the scene in the nick of time and saved the situation. Most assuredly she must have had great experience in saving situations, for she handled the matter with a deftness acquired only by practice, poured oil, instilled enthusiasm, awakened sympathy, and made Tamar feel that in looking after the welfare of two prisoners of war, she was practically looking after all the British prisoners of war in the hands of the Germans. Tamar liked her as much as she had hated the personage.

"What's the use of a person of that description?" she said to Bramfield afterwards. "I know the type well. They come sniggering to me when they want money. I always revenge myself by driving hard bargains with them. What's she doing there?"

"Giving her name," he answered with a smile. "That is where the value of people like herself comes in. And it is a very real value. The public lives on names. You'll see that when you come to the London Opera House meeting this afternoon. You've promised to come, haven't you? I have a reserved place for you on the platform, at the back of the speakers, and you will hear well."

"I'll come," she said. "I've never been to a public meeting in my life, and I am sure I shall hate it. But I'll come."

She added:

"I hope marriage doesn't necessarily mean going often to public meetings?"

"No, only very occasionally," he laughed.

She went home first, laden with various tins of provisions, cigarettes and chocolates which she had bought on her way. They made a brave showing on the kitchen

table, and reduced the old char to a state almost bordering on imbecility from astonishment.

"Food for the prisoners of war!" she cried. "Well, I never! It fair takes my breath away what happens here now. Anything can happen now. Why, you'll be getting married some day. That'll be the next thing."

"Why not?" Tamar said with her soft laugh. "People do get married sometimes, don't they? I seem to have heard the report that they do."

An hour or two afterwards she started off for the meeting at the London Opera House, which had been organized on a large scale to raise money both for the Belgian refugees and for cargoes of food to be sent to the Belgians in Belgium. Bramfield was one of those who had been working up the meeting and Tamar had promised to attend it because she wished sincerely to take part in his life and show him that she was interested in what he was doing. As ever, she was struck by his forgetfulness of self. His personal trouble about his boy, his personal joy in having won her, seemed but to stimulate him to work more strenuously on behalf of others.

"With you, my Tamar, as ally," he had said, "everything becomes possible to me."

"I shall never be able to live up to that standard of perfection," she had answered, with her quaint frankness which always amused and touched him. Tamar, at least, would never pose — could never pose.

She arrived at the London Opera House to see a row of photographers awaiting the advent of Personages on whose names the public and the Press lived. She showed her ticket, followed the route indicated, and was shown to her place on the platform, where already many dis-

tinguished and influential people had assembled. Very much did she hate being there, and she was greatly wishing that she was safely back in her inner room, when Bramfield caught sight of her and came to greet her.

"I'm hating it before it has begun," she said.

"Well, you can't be feeling very cross, because you are still looking very beautiful," he whispered.

She learnt that she was amongst High Commissioners, Ambassadors, Dignitaries of the Church, Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, and men and women of importance in social and political life. She studied the names of the speakers, was entirely unimpressed by the list, and only thought it a pity that Bramfield was not going to address the meeting — Bramfield, who knew so much about the misery and needs of the Belgians. Well, perhaps these other speakers knew too, otherwise they would surely not have been invited to speak.

Tamar's childlike belief was soon dispelled. From the very beginning of the proceedings, she discovered to her amazement and disappointment that the Personages knew little or nothing of the cause they had been asked to advocate and support. They knew in theory, of course. But of the actual misery of the Belgian refugees and of the wonderful machinery set up by the American Commission to stem the tide of starvation amongst seven million inhabitants in Belgium, they evidently knew nothing. There was a good deal of high-sounding language, and there were streams of fine eloquence and noble sentiments; and as each orator followed the other, gracious tributes were paid to each predecessor for his address, which was said to have moved the hearts of all present by its convincing sin-

cerity and its comprehensive grasp. Tamar, unimpressed by names, and free from the awe of personality, thought all these speakers exceedingly prosy, and even comic. She longed to know, as she looked round, whether the audience were really being impressed or only pretending to be impressed. She thought probably only pretending because of the names. But wouldn't it even be better business as well as common sense to reach them really by the real thing? Wouldn't their purses come out more heavily laden and with greater alacrity, if some one rose up to draw a picture for them, for instance, of the Cargoes of Mercy?

Why wasn't Bramfield speaking? It was ridiculous that he was not speaking. Or why hadn't they made Gertrude Linton come over? She would have vitalized the meeting at once and exhilarated every one, including the Dignitaries of the Church. She would have conjured up for them the harrowing scene of the avalanche of panic-stricken refugees pouring over the Dutch frontier. She would have presented to them a vision of the Relief Ship they had seen, with its tons of rice and salt and corn and that condensed milk ardently longed for so that the lives of the starving little ones might be saved. She would have waved a wand and lo! the official messenger between Rotterdam and Brussels would have dashed on the platform, with his passport framed and hanging round his neck ready for all arrests and all contingencies. Another wave of the wand, and her friend the Captain would have been there imploring for a convoy against the perils presented by the English lady from Gröningen, and pretending to ignore congratulations on having run his vessel through the mine-fields in the dark and taken the sporting risk of disaster be-

cause of the crying need for bread and salt. Bread and salt — words burnt into the brain for evermore. Wouldn't some one get up and call them aloud? Wasn't there any one who was going to read some of the appeals for help from the burgomasters or priests of the villages and communes? No appeals could be more touching in their simplicity and directness, and far more powerful as an influence than all the vague rhetoric of these distinguished but boring Personages with names.

Some of the sentences echoed back to her:

"In the name of humanity help us."

"The communal funds are finished, and if you come not to help us, God knows what will become of us."

"Everything is missing. We are in want of potatoes, peas, beans, grain, flour, meat, bacon, clothes, wooden shoes, petroleum."

"Our communes are without resources. We have finished our short report. We have not dramatized it."

"Alas! the children born during this war, of mothers enfeebled by worries and privations, are very delicate."

What a thousand pities that there was no one to speak these words aloud, no one to tell the audience of the amazingly clever machinery of the American Relief Commission, and of the enthusiasm and disinterestedness of all the people she had seen working to help the Belgians under the heel of the Germans in Belgium and the refugees in Holland — no one to show them even a glimpse of the concentration camps, the granaries, the railway sheds, the barge packed with homeless, hounded men, women and children — no one to tell them the story of Marie Louise, and show them the dark hold, and in the dim light of the lamp a young girl moaning

and rocking herself to and fro — lost, unknown, unclaimed . . .

Why, she herself could tell them — she, Tamar, who had never made a speech in her life. She could tell them how it had all affected her, and how the scenes and the sufferings she had witnessed and the tales she had heard had burnt themselves into her brain for evermore. And why shouldn't she tell them? Why not? Why shouldn't she stand up and stop that dull Personage and tell them a few real things instead?

Almost she rose to her feet. Never before had she felt so impersonal, so disinterested, so concerned for large issues. When such a crisis comes to any one, all barriers are broken down and all impossibilities surmounted and all consequences ignored. Another minute — and Tamar would have spoken, improbable though it seems. Another minute — and she would have disgraced herself and Bramfield, and outraged the assembly by an outburst of sincerity and truthfulness and by a protest against the dull, disheartening, devitalizing methods of a representative platform of Names-Highly-Placed-in-all-Walks-of-Prosperous-Life.

What prevented her, what restrained her? It was Bramfield himself, who had slipped in to sit next to her. By the merest chance — and providentially for him — her eyes met his. He was looking at her proudly, kindly, evidently delighted to have her there and to be able to send her a silent message of greeting. His words were wafted to her:

"With you as ally, my Tamar, everything will be possible to me."

Ah, she must not fail Bramfield — Bramfield, who loved and trusted her, and who had asked her to come to

the meeting to hearten and support him, not to disconcert him. She would tell him what she thought about it afterwards. She wouldn't spare him. But she must not embarrass him now — no — certainly not — why, she had been mad — she, Tamar, to think of such a thing — entirely mad — the harrowing scenes brought back to her remembrance had got into her brain — that is how it was — just that. . . .

So the moment of danger passed, known to no one save herself. The Personage droned on. Others succeeded him with addresses from which all real stirring details and all human touches were absent. The meeting came to a conclusion in an avalanche of compliments to all the speakers. It was pronounced by the newspapers to have been brilliantly successful, stimulating, and profoundly moving, the agony of Belgium having been described by the galaxy of Names in words which wrung the heart.

When Tamar read the reports, she marvelled, as many others marvel when they read reports.

CHAPTER III

IT was about eleven o'clock one night at the end of September when a ring came at Tamar's shop door, a long and persistent ring. She had not yet gone to bed, for she was trying to make up her mind which of her stones she would part with next. She had already parted with several, secretly and after great mental agony — not her choicest treasures, it is true, but some she prized very highly. They were of considerable value and had brought in large sums, which she had dispatched anonymously to the Red Cross and to other organizations which were appealing for funds.

She had the idea now firmly implanted in her mind that she must no longer hoard for her secret pleasure so many lovely things. Her talk with Bramfield about her mother had to a certain extent set her free to pursue her own course unimpeded by the past.

Sacrifice seemed to be the order of the day. Scarcely an afternoon passed without some one coming in to sell jewels, or old silver, or some antique greatly prized. From long years of keen observation, Tamar knew at once when a real sacrifice was being made for an unselfish object. She knew those signs as well as she knew when some society woman, head over heels in debt, dashed in to raise ready money on her jewels, and avert disgrace and exposure. Human nature, she believed, had been to her an easy book to read; but the pages she was turning over now, chronicled with records of unselfishness, patriotism, public-spiritedness and impersonal

concern, had puzzled her not a little at first, because they were not isolated passages, such as she might have picked out easily before as exceptional incidents, but a whole continuous story in the same vein. At the beginning she had put up an obstinate, logged, almost angry resistance to this avalanche of influences emanating even from her own business dealings. But it had broken down. Old silver, old snuff-boxes, étuis, bonbonnières, enamels, china, hideous and cherished old family jewels, old gold, antiques of every kind — and old people, trembling and eager, stormed the shop in Dean Street, and told her plainly enough that she, too, must make sacrifices.

Finally she accepted the misfortune as part of the general "churn up," and was succumbing to it tonight, though not without her usual attack of misery over the tragedy of parting with yet another passionately loved possession. Her hesitation between a very beautiful turquoise and a second-rate but interesting sapphire was cut short by the sound of the bell. When she opened the door, she found Gertrude Linton with a small suit-case and a bundle, and a young woman who was carrying a baby.

"T. Scott," Miss Linton said, "you promised you'd take any one in I brought suddenly. Is it all right?"

"Come in," Tamar said, her face lighting up with a smile of welcome, and all her misery of renunciation forgotten. "I'm so glad you've come. I don't mind whom you bring, as long as you come yourself."

"Ah, it's nice to hear you say that," Miss Linton said. "But I knew you would not fail. We've had such a bad crossing from Flushing, and only narrowly escaped being torpedoed. But here we are, safe and

sound. Now, T. Scott, we must just get this poor thing to bed. You must trot out your French and say something to cheer her. Don't be frightened of the baby. The baby won't eat you. Why, do you know, I nearly brought two or three others with me. So you're really lucky to have only one foisted on you! Tell Madame Guérin she has a very beautiful child. That will put her at her ease."

Tamar, who did not know one baby from another, murmured something about *un très joli petit enfant.*

The result was successful, for young Madame Guérin brightened up at once, and let forth a volley of language in admiration of the baby and in gratitude to Miss Linton for bringing her and Tamar for receiving her.

"It's all she has got," Gertrude Linton explained. "She is from Aerschot. Her husband has been killed at the front, also her two brothers, and her little brother of sixteen shot before her eyes for trying to rescue his young sister from the German soldiers. I wonder she has remained in her right senses. I suppose the baby helped her. She has been waiting for some weeks in the Friends' hostel at Flushing until she heard from an aunt she has at Tulse Hill. I'll get her there tomorrow, so we won't be upsetting you for long."

"She must stay till you have made all the arrangements properly," Tamar said.

"I knew you would not fail me," Miss Linton repeated, with a sigh of content. "When this poor thing came into my hands, I marked her down for you. I said: 'T. Scott's bedroom for her and the baby, my Jacobean couch for me, where I was very comfortable on a previous occasion, thank you, and any old where for T. Scott herself!'"

Tamar laughed. She was very happy that Gertrude Linton had believed she would not fail her.

The young mother and her babe were put to bed warm and snug in Tamar's room. Madame Guérin kept on murmuring, with tears rolling down her cheeks:

"I have my little one safe — I have my little one safe."

It was her one thought, and, as Gertrude Linton said, it kept at bay, mercifully, for a time, the remembrance of her losses and of the tragedies she had been through.

As they left her and went downstairs, Miss Linton said:

"Do you remember the other little babe we saw together when we were on one of our quests for Marie Louise?"

"Yes," Tamar answered. "I shall never forget the face of that little one, calm with the dignity and mystery of death."

"And what of Marie Louise?" asked Gertrude Linton. "Do you ever see her?"

"No," Tamar said, shaking her head. "They judged it best that she should not see any one connected with that tragic time in her life. And perhaps they were right. But I do not forget Marie Louise. She became very dear to me. It was a wrench to part from her."

She added:

"They say she has recovered, and that her eyes are bright once more, and that her laughter rings through the house. It does not seem possible, does it?"

"Greater miracles have happened than that," said Gertrude Linton gently; and perhaps she may have thought of the miracle which appeared to have taken

place in the case of this dealer in antique jewellery and precious stones.

For long hours they talked over the fire in the inner room. Miss Linton was deeply concerned over the news that Bramfield's boy was a prisoner in Germany. She said that the country was not half realizing the tragedy of the fate of the prisoners. Rumours were coming through to Holland that they were being starved and ill-treated and insulted, and apparently with no one to intervene on their behalf. She had heard reports direct from some of the American Relief Commission people who were able to enter Germany. And she herself had seen and spoken to two escaped soldiers who had, after innumerable hardships, made their way over the frontier at Maestricht.

"Never shall I forget the look on their faces," she said, "nor their joy in talking to a countrywoman and in knowing that they were in friendly hands and would not be betrayed. I could weep over the prisoners — all of them — soldiers and civilians alike. The thought of them stirs me more than anything. There is nothing I would not do or be to help them if I could. The plight of the civilians is bad enough. You know I've been put on the Committee of Reception at the frontier to look after them when they are exchanged — and, T. Scott, the sights I've seen — I could weep."

She was so greatly overcome by emotion that she did weep.

"We over there, who see the sights, feel that we can never rest nor give any one any rest until something is arranged about them," she said. "There ought to be a storm party keeping up a continuous attack on our comfortable officials in their comfortable offices here

until every soldier and every civilian has been exchanged."

She broke off to dry her tears, and then went on:

"The people in England must be made to understand; but it will takes ages before they wake up. And meantime the suffering increases — the unnecessary suffering. I can't get a poor old civilian from Ruhleben out of my mind. He was about seventy years old, or nearly, and poor old fellow — he had gone queer in the head, like Marie Louise, you know. He told me solemnly that he was going to divorce his wife when he got back to England. And I believe the truth was, that they were most devoted to each other and had lived in the same house in the same suburb for about thirty years."

She smiled in spite of herself.

"I call that a feat, don't you?" she said. "It's more than I could do."

And then she added:

"Poor old man — poor old fellow — I was more upset about him than any one I've seen, because he was old — and the old cannot bear these shocks — they simply cannot — and it is cruel they should have to. Why are you staring at me, T. Scott? You think I'm an awful fool, don't you?"

"I was thinking," Tamar said dreamily, "that if I lived to be a thousand years old in the same house, in the same street, in the same suburb, I could never be as disinterested as you. I suppose it is born in one and cannot be acquired."

"Still a bee in your bonnet about disinterestedness," Gertrude Linton laughed.

"Yes," Tamar answered, "if you like to put it that way."

"And what about those generous cheques you've been sending to Holland?" Gertrude Linton asked. "You have not any idea how pleased we have all been — the Commission for Relief, and the Friends, and the Dutch Committee, and the English lady at Gröningen, to say nothing of myself. I wish you could see some of the people we have clothed with your money."

"It has only been money," Tamar said slowly.

"Only money?" Miss Linton repeated. "Well, I don't mind having as much more 'only money' as you choose to send."

"It isn't enough," Tamar said sulkily. "One has to part with one's treasures. I find that very difficult. But those words you said about my precious stones, which I tried to hide from you that night you were here, haunted me. I tried to forget them, but could not."

"Oh, but they were only said in fun, in my irresponsible way which no one ought to take any notice of," Gertrude Linton insisted.

"Before you came tonight," Tamar continued, "I was trying to make up my mind to part with a favourite turquoise. It will be far easier now you are here."

"Let me see it," Gertrude Linton said. She was greatly touched by Tamar's attitude to her.

Tamar laid it almost reverently in the palm of Gertrude Linton's hand.

"It is Persian," she said softly. "From the Abdurrezzagi mines in Mishapur province."

This was double Dutch to her friend, but she was evidently expected to feel impressed by the information,

and consequently she did look both impressed and awe-stricken. Her sympathetic nature which never failed at a crisis, enabled her to know that T. Scott was really suffering, and that the sacrifice she was proposing to make, meant a great deal to her. She learnt that this was by no means the first treasure to be sacrificed. Little by little she wormed it out of Tamar that many favourite possessions had been sold and the money sent anonymously to several destinations.

"But often grudgingly, very grudgingly," poor Tamar confessed.

And no one knew, no one was to know. Tamar was very emphatic about that. No, she had not told Bramfield. Bramfield was not to know, though he had made it easier for her by something he had said. One day she would tell him, perhaps, but she wanted to wait until she could say truthfully that what she was doing was done with joy and not with a struggle.

"And probably that will never be," she said, with a pathetic little smile which went straight to Gertrude Linton's heart. "Now, you would simply throw them round. I can't help envying you."

"But then you see, I don't care," her friend explained. "I'm built that way. You are not. All the more credit to you if you can give up some of your precious stones. I think it is ripping of you, T. Scott. No, I won't betray you, especially if you shut my mouth with one or two for the prisoners and refugees! Without a bribe, I cannot answer for my silence."

Tamar laughed her soft laugh.

"You shall have the turquoise," she said, "and this sapphire which will go next — if I can screw myself up to part with it."

"The turquoise for the Belgians," Miss Linton said, "and the sapphire for the prisoners. I hope its hour will come soon; I think it will, somehow. You don't look like any of the comfortable officials in their comfortable offices, making delays which neither they nor we understand."

"Its hour has come now," Tamar said, turning away. "The prisoners can have it now. But you mustn't stop here for long. You would end by getting everything out of me."

"You are a trump," Gertrude Linton said, her face radiant with pleasure. And she clutched Tamar by the arm and swung her round.

"Do you know you are looking very beautiful?" she said. "And years younger."

"So Bramfield tells me," Tamar laughed, blushing.

"Ah, that's it, is it?" said Gertrude Linton, guessing the truth. "I am glad he has that solace in his anxiety."

Whilst Gertrude Linton slept on the Jacobean couch, forgetful of Belgian widows and babies and English prisoners of war and all their sufferings, Tamar pondered afresh over that wonderful quality, disinterestedness, which was as much a revelation to her as a sunrise to eyes who have never seen one — haunting, full of strange surprises, loveliness after loveliness unfolding itself and fading away, as if of no moment, with no trace left of its radiant share in the glory, and yet part of the glory, the whole glory.

"If I'm not careful, that woman will get my best ruby out of me. She's dangerous, because disinterested," Tamar thought, before she too went to sleep.

In the morning the old char found the remains of a good supper on the kitchen table, and an empty bottle of Tamar's best wine. In the inner room she discovered Tamar asleep in the easy chair, and a woman with her hair tumbling over her rolled up in a rug on the Jacobean couch. From upstairs came the sound of a baby crying and a foreigner's voice singing to it in some strange gibberish.

"Well," she said, "these be queer times, and no mistake. Milk for the cat — a fire in the kitchen — people coming and going — food for every one — love-making over the counter — parcels for prisoners — and a baby screaming upstairs. It fair takes my breath away."

It fair took Tamar's breath away when she awoke to the unwonted screaming. She had to remind herself that it was only part of the churn up.

CHAPTER IV

BUT for all her screaming, the little Belgian baby was not hustled off the following day. She was settled snugly and warmly in a beautiful old oaken box in the inner room, and was visited at frequent intervals by every one, including the old char, whose one and only remark was:

"Well, I never — no, I never!"

Gertrude Linton had gone off to Tulse Hill to make inquiries about Madame Guérin's aunt. She left word with Tamar that if Bramfield called during her absence, he was to be asked to look in again that evening and bring with him the last details he had received concerning Bruce. She thought that his friend, the American military attaché at The Hague, might be able to make inquiries about the boy, and that news of him would come through quicker in this way than by the usual machinery of intelligence. Or, better still, why should not Bramfield come to Holland and ask the attaché himself? He had been long overdue at the Commission, where they wanted his advice. And if he came, would not Tamar come also and see the many changes which the Dutch had effected in their arrangements for their refugee guests?

"And I would like you to see the reconstruction work of the Friends at the concentration camps," she said, "especially at Uden, where I am stationed. The women's work-room, too, where they make wool carpets and rugs, under our supervision. Our friend, the Com-

mandant kept his word and sent for us. So the wool came in useful."

What about the shop? Oh, Bramfield could put some one in to look after it. He had done this before, hadn't he? Yes, Tamar said he had, and she supposed he could easily arrange again. But she was not sure she wanted to go. It was not her habit to upset her everyday life in this sudden fashion. Gertrude Linton thought that quite absurd. It was a good thing for people's everyday life to be deranged and the even tenor of their ways disturbed, provided, of course, that they were not old.

"It is always the old people that tear at my heart," she said. "I shall not easily forget the day when the Friends put up the first cottage at the concentration camp at Uden, and an aged Belgian woman and her two grandchildren entered into possession of it. She wept with joy to have a little home of her own again, a private, personal, separate haven of her own. Poor old lady — she had indeed had her habits upset. Now, T. Scott, listen to me. It isn't every one that has the chance of going to Holland. The Government makes it more difficult every week. But you could get through as my assistant, and you could help me with the girls' work-room. Now, don't be 'stuffy,' but just turn it over in your mind whilst I go off to Tulse Hill. The more I think of it, the more I want you to come back with me. And take care of the baby. And give the mother some stitching to do. And if she weeps, admire the baby and call it 'chou-chou.' Now I'm off."

Tamar rose to the occasion, and when Madame Guérin showed signs of beginning to weep, she admired

the baby and called it " chou-chou," and various other names which she looked out laboriously in the dictionary. But it was a relief when Bramfield arrived and carried on an animated conversation with Madame Guérin, which restored her spirits more effectually than any of Tamar's awkward attempts. She could not but love him afresh, in her own queer way. His kindness and gentleness and unselfishness always touched her and filled her with admiration. In a moment he was able to put aside his own troubles and anxieties in order to comfort and encourage this poor young widow, the tragedy of whose tale roused all his sympathy and indignation.

" Tamar," he cried, " don't you see we can never do enough for these people? But for them, the Germans would have been here, and Madame Guérin's story, the story of thousands in Belgium, could have been the story of any woman in England. When I think of all the awful things I've heard of their barbarous doings, I don't know how to contain myself. I know I would give my soul to be a young man — and in the fighting line. I never in my life envied any one except Bruce when he went to the front. And I envy him now, poor lad, whatever his fate, because it is for his country's sake that he has got his wounds and lost his liberty."

Tom Thornton, who had been at an aerodrome all this time, came whilst Bramfield was there. He was wearing the double wings of a flying officer, and was very pleased with himself, though just as boyishly lighthearted as ever.

" Yes," he said, in answer to their congratulations, " I'm the real thing now. And I expect to be posted to

the Expeditionary Force in a week or two, and with a new squadron going out for the first time. A piece of luck that, as I shall have my pals with me. So now I'm going to have my chance of helping to strafe the Boche. I'm so excited I don't know how to keep quiet. I don't try."

Bramfield put his hand on the lad's shoulder.

"I envy you," he said, with great emotion. "It's simply maddening not to be young at this time."

"It's jolly good being young, sir," Tom said, smiling and thinking old Bramfield was a funny old cuss.

Bramfield turned to Tamar and said:

"You ought to find one of your mascots for him. You have some interesting ones somewhere."

"She gave me one long ago," Tom said. "Miss Scott and I are special friends, you know — have been, ever since she came to Marton Grange and told us the precious stones were worth pots of money. Good piece of news that, sir. Good tuning up for the stunt of friendly understanding."

He fumbled at his neck and drew out a ribbon with Tamar's queer old talisman attached to it. Bramfield looked at it and nodded.

"That ought to keep you safe," he said. "Ruby and turquoise."

And Tamar, as if again impelled by some mystic power, closed her eyes and swayed to and fro.

"From all dangers of earth, sea and air, from all dangers of earth, sea and air, from all dangers of earth, sea and air," she murmured.

Tom himself broke the spell.

"Well," he said, "if that doesn't keep me safe, noth-

ing will. But it will. I shall be all right. Of course I think it my duty to cheer up the Mater at intervals by saying I won't. And that reminds me, she wants you to come tonight. Will you? I'll hop round and fetch you."

"No, I can't come tonight," Tamar said. "I have Miss Linton from Holland staying here. She came last evening with a Belgian refugee and a baby."

She laughed as she spoke. It struck her as being funny that domestic responsibilities should keep her at home.

"I know," Tom said, "suppose we all come here — every one of us, including the Mater. She'd come any old distance to see a baby — brave any dangers of earth, sea and air, gas, poisoned bombs and all other amenities of this civilized war. Could you do with the whole lot — some of the tribe you saw last time you came to us? Big order, but rather fun. About nine or ten of us — all the Thorntons, two of the fellows you saw before, and one or two of the girls' friends."

"Why not?" Tamar said, a little taken aback, but pleased with the idea.

"Cheerioh," he said. "I'm off to tell them."

"Bramfield," Tamar said, with sudden panic after Tom had dashed away. "I've never had a party. You'll be here for certain, won't you? Miss Linton is expecting to see you."

"Of course," he answered, smiling. "It's my home now, in a sort of way, isn't it? Always has been the home of my spirit for years and years."

"If we married, you'd not expect me to leave this place?" she asked dreamily.

"I could not think of you in any other home except

Dean Street, nor in any other den except the inner room," he answered.

She nodded. She seemed relieved.

"I've had a panic about that," she said.

"You need not," he said. "I simply couldn't think of you in any other setting. You'd be like a precious stone mounted wrong. Don't have a panic about that. Don't have a panic about anything. I'm going to tell you something."

"What's that?" she asked, a little uneasily.

"You must be free, my Tamar," he said, staring fixedly at the floor. "I believe you feel chained up."

"Yes, a bit," she said, also staring at the floor.

"You regret the embraces we've exchanged?" he said.

"No, no," she said, turning to him quickly. "No, no."

"You dread marriage — don't want it?" he asked.

"I don't want marriage yet, Bramfield," she said. "I dread giving up my liberty — I've always been free — I cannot pretend I should like it — I shouldn't — at least sometimes — very often, I think I shouldn't."

"Then let's go back to where we were before," he said very kindly. "I've been a fool. I might have known you could not be happy that way. I have known."

"We cannot go back to where we were before, because I know that I cannot think of life without you, Bramfield," she said. "Before, I could. But I cannot now."

"You can't do without poor old Bramfield," he said, "and yet cannot make a sacrifice to have him. That's how it stands, isn't it?"

"Well, it sounds hateful enough," she answered, with an uneasy smile. "But I suppose it's true."

"I also cannot do without you," he said. "And if we married, I might find I hadn't got you, after all. That would be worse than anything. So that if you had made the sacrifice, you might have made it in vain. No use, then, in making it — or accepting it. Whereas now, you feel you belong to me and I belong to you, even though there is no union by marriage or without marriage. Is that so?"

"Yes," she said.

"You can't face the loneliness, and I can't face the loneliness, and we've got to do the best we can with our respective natures," he said. "That's so, isn't it? Well, don't let us try to solve the problem just now. Perhaps it will solve itself. Perhaps some day you will be coming to me and saying: 'I don't mind getting married to you, Bramfield.' And I shall answer: 'Much obliged to you, Tamar. I've been waiting for a long time, and am quite ready.' Meanwhile you'll wear the ring, won't you, as a sign that you cannot do without me?"

She did not speak a word, but put one hand over the ring, as if to press it into her fingers.

And then she said:

"I wonder why it is that you have always loved me, Bramfield?"

"I couldn't tell you," he said. "But I always have, from the moment I entered your shop and received my first bit of rudeness from you."

"Yes, I remember," she said. "It was over a diamond. I've never cared for diamonds in the same way that I have cared for rubies and the other stones.

You said it was a want in me. That made me angry."

"And you were angry," he said, smiling. "Well, I still maintain it is a want. Are you going to be rude again?"

"No," she answered. "I don't suppose I shall ever be rude to you again, after that miserable episode of the reconstructed emerald. I should be too frightened of losing you."

"You'll never lose me, my Tamar," he said. "Whatever you do, or whatever you don't do now, you'll never lose me."

She still kept her hand over the ring, pressing it in with fingers that trembled a little.

"I don't believe there is any one else on earth as fine and generous as you are," she said.

"Nonsense," he said, "there is nothing fine and generous in making the best of circumstances when one knows one cannot face the loneliness of spirit which would ensue if one didn't. That's the way to look at it. Don't let us burden ourselves with the problem. It will settle itself. Things do settle themselves, as letters answer themselves if we leave them alone."

He had gone over to the fireplace and was leaning his arm against the mantelshelf. Tamar went to him.

"It is so exactly like me to disappoint you at the time when you are so troubled about Bruce," she said.

"You have not disappointed me, dear Tamar," he said. "If you had told me you could do without me, then I could not have raised my head. But I can raise it now — high. I have the right to. Tamar cannot do without me."

He took both her hands, brought them together and kissed them — and let them go.

"And now," he said, gathering himself together, "I'm off, saying 'cheerioh,' like your friend Tom. I'll be here in good time this evening, and will bring some Green Chartreuse with me. And you must provide some of your golden Tokay. Don't be mean about it, Tamar — two bottles at least. A fine idea to have a party. It will cheer us up and do all these people good to meet Gertrude Linton and hear a few things from her. Good for them to talk with the Belgian woman, and see a glimpse of the suffering and wrongs going on wherever the Germans have their grip. We don't know half enough here. That is why we are so placid. Don't be anxious about your party. It will be a great success."

And it was. Mrs. Thornton, having adored the Belgian baby and wept over it to her heart's content, settled down comfortably in the inner room, and brought out her knitting, without which she was never seen. She was amused and perhaps a little concerned to see how her family and their friends made themselves at home in Tamar's shop, and how Tom and Marion dashed around and brought her various things to admire, as though they had a proprietary right in them. But Tamar did not seem to think that any one was taking liberties, and it was evident that she was very happy amongst her guests. At their request she opened her safe and showed them some of her treasures and laid herself out to give them pleasure. Tom, who was in fine form, translated into primitive French some of her remarks and explanations. Madame Guérin, caught by his fun and gaiety, laughed and said:

"Très bien, Monsieur, très bien. Je comprends."

It was decided that she must indeed be a genius to understand a single word that he uttered. He also took it upon himself to hold forth on one or two jewels, much to Tamar's amusement.

"This, ladies and gentlemen, is a valuable ruby from Golconda or Gomorrah, I forget which. After various vicissitudes incidental to precious stones, which, as you know, pass through many hardships in the process of their formation and many adventures in their course of existence, it came into the possession of Charles the First, and a day or two after his decapitation was bought by Miss Scott, of Dean Street, Soho, for the trifling sum of three thousand pounds. Date's a little wrong, but no matter. Time is nothing. Please note its wonderful lustre. I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, there's nothing I don't know about precious stones, from a pebble to a pearl. Blindfolded, I can tell the difference between a fragment of a broken soda-water bottle and an emerald of the finest water. You cannot therefore dispute my right to be considered as an expert of the first rank — far superior to my brother Rupert, who has merely acquired his well-known reputation by swotting up books of reference — and notably a stupendous work on the subject by my honoured friend, Miss Scott of Dean Street."

Tamar's brain fairly reeled with the information he gave her about aerodrome life, machines and flying. He explained nose dives, sideslips, falling leaf, looping the loop and many other "stunts," at a rate calculated to annihilate all powers of lay understanding. At the same speed he commented on all the different characteristics of all the aeroplanes up to date, German and French, as well as British. When he had done, it was

more than doubtful whether she would have known a captive balloon from a twin-engined Gotha biplane, a Zeppelin from a single-seated scout.

Gertrude Linton arrived a little late. Bramfield went to open the door for her, and when she heard there was a party on, she sat down in the shop and had a talk with him about Bruce. She told him that she had heard there was a chance of the German Government allowing an American Mission of medical men to visit some of the prisoners' camps, and report on them. How would it be if he came to Holland at once and saw his friend the American military attaché at The Hague? If the scheme came off, he might be able to get Bruce's camp included in the inspection, and in this way Bramfield might perhaps get direct news of his boy's condition. Bramfield said he was more than ready to go. He would have rushed off at once if he had not known that she was coming to London, and would probably have something to suggest that would be better than all his vague plans.

"Well, you have not lost any time," she said. "We only heard a day or two ago that the Germans would be likely to allow anything of the kind. So we can go together. And T. Scott must come. I insist. She must see the concentration camp at Uden, whether she likes it or not. You must insist, Bramfield. You can, you know!"

She laughed a shy little laugh, as if to indicate that she knew a secret, and patted him on the hand.

"She'll come," he said, smiling. "As long as it is not to a public meeting, T. Scott will come anywhere, with a little urging! She only needs a little urging. She's not accustomed to run about, as you and I do.

We'll all go together. You have given me fresh heart. I knew you would."

Gertrude Linton was tired and looked tired, but with coffee and cakes and Tokay she revived, and was at her best, so bright and animated, eager and enthusiastic. She held them all spellbound. She told them how she helped to receive the exchanged prisoners at the frontier, told them how they looked, what they said. She told them thrilling stories about spies and escaped prisoners. She told them how the flying men interned at a fortress in Holland dug a tunnel and were found in the act, and how the Commandant, very angry at first, forgave them and was photographed in the tunnel in his pyjamas, smoking a cigar! She told them details of what was going on in Holland, and rumours of happenings in Germany, and numerous anecdotes of the smuggling that took place, and incidents at the frontier, both comic and tragic. She described her visit to the Naval Division interned at Gröningen and the Belgian soldiers interned at Zeist, and spoke about the Belgian refugees in their early misery and the present new concentration camps for them which Miss Scott was shortly going to visit. Yes, she was.

"Go on, tell us something more," they kept on saying when she stopped.

"Something more about the Secret Service," Winifred said.

"Something more about the smuggling," Tom said.

"Something more about the prisoners," Rupert said.

"Yes, and something more about the wounded ones," Marion said.

"And about the homeless refugees," said Mrs. Thornton. "They fill me with pity."

She told them the tragedy of Aerschot — a story which came into the Press later. Madame Guérin had come from Aerschot and Gertrude Linton gave them her sad history in her very presence, knowing of course that she could not understand. She did this on purpose, so that they might hear a tale of wrong and cruelty and brutality, with a living instance in their midst testifying silently to her words. She told them other instances which were included later in the Bryce Report.

She roused their interest, enlisted their sympathy, stimulated their patriotism. She cared so much herself, that all of them, listening to her, were moved by the feeling that in their own separate ways, however humble, they must do their bit to their uttermost limit to save their own country from the fate she had described — a fate shared by the occupied parts of noble France and later by Serbia and wherever the Germans crushed a foe.

It was Mrs. Thornton who voiced their thoughts. When she rose to go, she turned to Gertrude Linton, put out both her hands and said:

"You have made me understand that no sacrifice can be too great, and no service too strenuous. I cared before, but now I care a thousand times more."

Upstairs, alone, she thanked Tamar for having given them such a chance.

"We don't know enough in England," she said. "We are too comfortable, too safe, too much intent on our own personal concerns. God forbid that such a

fate should overtake us, but we do need to have some truths driven into us to awaken us to our best fulfilment."

She drew a paper from her knitting-bag. It was the old family paper which Rupert had found.

"I have long wanted," she said, "to show you something I value greatly — something which Rupert found in his father's desk. It seemed too sacred to speak of — even to you — and yet I have all along wanted you to see it, because it explained some things which wounded me and over which you comforted me when I most needed comfort. I will leave it with you. I cannot speak of it now. It seems so personal, so petty and unimportant, after hearing all that your friend has been telling us. Old woman that I am, I feel stirred to do or bear anything, everything, for England's sake."

"She stirs me," Tamar said. "When I hear her and am with her, her disinterestedness always strikes me afresh and impels me to break some of the bonds which bind me to my own affairs. And against my will."

Mrs. Thornton put the paper in Tamar's hands.

"Keep it in your safe," she said. "It has a right to be there, for when you read it, you will understand that in its way it is a treasure. I would rather that Rupert had found it than any more precious stones hidden away anywhere."

And then, as if she had dismissed all interest in personal concerns, she clasped her hands together, and with a fervour which had nothing old in it, exclaimed:

"Oh, that I were young! I envy that woman — I envy my boys — Rupert, for what he has passed through — Tom, for what he is going to meet — my

girls — Marion, for her work in the hospital — Winifred, for hers — Dorothy, at the Front. I envy all young people. If I were young, nothing could hold me back — nothing."

That night, when Madame Guérin and her babe were sleeping peacefully upstairs, and Gertrude Linton was in a profound and well-deserved slumber on the Jacobean couch, Tamar opened the Thornton family document, and read the compact which Richard Thornton had made with the Almighty on December 31st, 1789, and the comment added by the man who had striven against his secret passion for precious stones — and failed. There was the history of his spiritual combat in a few bare words — her history. He had failed — and died in failure.

And what about herself? Was she also going to fail and die in failure?

She held the old yellow paper for a long time in her hands. She understood what it meant to Mrs. Thornton. She saw how this message from the dead, more than a century old, with its pathetic postscript, a year or two old, explained, condoned, pleaded, reconciled, healed.

She placed it on the upper shelf of the safe, where her most cherished possessions lay concealed.

She fell asleep at last, but in her dreams a voice was wafted to her, chanting, as if from infinite distance, the words:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and thieves break through and steal."

The voice was Bramfield's.

CHAPTER V

BRAMFIELD and Miss Linton got their way. Tamar was persuaded to let him leave one of his men in charge of the shop in Dean Street, and rushed off to Holland as soon as he could make arrangements about her passport and permit. It was easy enough for him to come and go, because of his official connection with the American Relief Commission. And this time Tamar went officially to help Miss Linton in the work room at the concentration camp at Uden. Later, it became impossible to get over so easily; but in these earlier days the strictures as to travelling were not severely enforced, though our Government was beginning to take measures to discourage it, and the service to Holland was already being curtailed.

Gertrude Linton had not been able to wait for them, so they journeyed alone, as before. They left Tilbury on a Saturday evening, and arrived at Flushing on Sunday evening about six. They had an uneventful journey, though Bramfield pointed out to Tamar an Englishman who was being watched by Scotland Yard on suspicion of having dealings with the enemy. Later he was trapped, and met his fate one dawn outside the Tower. The German wife of another Englishman was also being shadowed. As a British subject, she was free to move about, and as a German, married to a man who had lived abroad for years and was known to have pro-German tendencies, she had every access to Germany, where her husband was interned at Ruhleben.

She was a delightful-looking woman, with the platform manner and appearance of a prima donna in her prime. Tamar shuddered to think of the fate which she might be preparing for herself.

At Flushing they were met by Gertrude Linton and one of their old acquaintances, the Belgian *délégué* working with the American Relief Commission, and were whipped off to the hotel where they had stayed before.

"Flushing is more than ever a nest of spies, T. Scott," Miss Linton said. "I have to be so careful, that I scarcely dare snore in my sleep lest I should thereby be giving away State secrets!"

Gretchen, the German maid, was still there, but her manner was decidedly less friendly, though she still claimed to have a disinterested sympathy for all nations, and said:

"Ach, ach, the mad people all at each other's throat. Ach, ach, when will it all end, so that we can be happy and peaceful again."

She had received a letter that morning from her Fritz, interned in England, and she told Tamar about it.

"He speaks well of the treatment," she said. "Plenty of good food and no bullying. Na, na, the English are kind. Always I speak of them as I found them."

Tamar, remembering Miss Linton's words of caution, did not allow herself to be drawn into any conversation; and as it was second nature to her to be suspicious and cautious, it was easy enough to be on her guard, even though she certainly had no information to impart — nothing, she reflected, that seemed of the least importance, except indeed the address of the Military

Hospital. But Gertrude Linton had told her that every little detail was snatched up and devoured, and that she would probably be questioned about her journey in a way, the artfulness of which she might not realize.

Silence and sulkiness were therefore the best attributes to possess on a visit to a neutral country; and these Tamar had at her command in their perfected condition.

The next morning Miss Linton whirled her off to the Belgian refugee concentration camp *(Vluchtoord)* at Uden, leaving Bramfield to make his way to The Hague to see his friend, the American military attaché, and find out whether the proposed American Medical Mission to Germany was really to be allowed to inspect the prison camps, and whether Döberitz was to be included in the list.

A car was waiting for them when they had arrived at the nearest station, and after a drive of four or five miles they arrived at Uden, where Tamar was going to stay at the headquarters of the Society of Friends, who had been invited by the Dutch to help in organizing industries and employments for men and women in the camp, and to superintend the erection of *maisons démontables* for the refugees with money provided by the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee, and by a generous gift from Denmark.

The camp was situated in fine open country, on heather-covered moors stretching away nearly as far as one could see. The Friends' hut and the *maisons démontables* were outside the main camp itself, which was directly opposite. To this suburb Miss Linton and Tamar drove up. They waited to see a Dutch

marriage procession pass along the road, the bride in the white head-dress of the district, surmounted by a modern hat, the unmarried girls wearing, as usual, their black head-dresses crowned in many instances by modern millinery — a strange mixture of tradition and fashion by no means beautiful. Then they passed on to their hut, where they were received by three or four of the Friends' workers, and by some of the Belgian refugees already established in their own little homes. The children ran up and surrounded Gertrude Linton at once. It was easy to see that they loved her.

The hut consisted of a sitting-room, a kitchen and two bedrooms, with beds which formed part of the structure. It was built in such a way that, like all the other *maisons démontables*, it could be taken to pieces and set up later in Belgium when happier times dawned for the Belgian people.

A fragrant cup of coffee in the little sitting-room, and then Tamar was taken out to see the sights. They visited first of all some of the huts of which there were already about sixty. Their first visit was to an old woman of nearly eighty, who had three grandchildren with her. She was proud of her cottage and grateful for it. It was wonderful, she said, to have a home of her own again, a separate, private, personal little home. And there she would be able to rest and wait in patience and serenity for the day which might, perhaps, never dawn for her — the day of return to her beloved Termonde. But there was at least the hope in her heart and meantime the unspeakable blessing of a real haven all to herself, instead of a bare shelter shared with hundreds. Tamar, who had seen the misery of the

early days of flight and exile, the crowded sheds, the packed barracks, the barges filled to overflowing, realized as only one who had witnessed those heartrending scenes could realize, the meaning and depth of the old woman's thankfulness.

Very calm and beautiful she looked in the dignity of her sweet patience. She waved to them as they left, and pointed to the little ones playing with the sand outside and planting dead bits of heather to make a garden like that of the English ladies. That was their ambition. At the moment, it seemed to have but small chance of fulfilment, but Grand'mère was quite content and said, smiling:

"Are they not making a beautiful garden, my clever little ones?"

She called them back to show them the curtains which she had lately received from the Society of Friends, and which completed the exclusiveness of her private establishment.

Then they called at some of the other houses, and heard the same story of thankfulness; though not all the refugees had the same charm of manner and sweetness of spirit as Grand'mère. Tamar thought the women were cheerier and more contented than the men. The men looked sullen and listless on the whole, but the carpenters who were putting up the houses, were in better form and exhilarated by having definite occupation. They had a direct interest in their job, for rightly enough, it had been arranged that those who gave their work in this way, should have the prior claim to inhabit the houses. Tamar and Miss Linton watched them for a time, and some of the men from the main camp had also strolled over to watch. It was

pathetic to see these able-bodied, idle fellows, idle through no fault of their own, crowding round a scene where at least some measure of activity was taking place — something with stir and life in it to break the dead monotony of no events. No wonder that the Dutch authorities, strained to the utmost in their efforts for the care and housing of thousands of uninvited guests, welcomed the help of outsiders to collaborate with them in dealing with the tragedy of idleness and the demoralization of character which inevitably accompanies it. Tamar, even in the first few hours after her arrival, began to feel that the Friends' relief work was something noble and far-reaching, like all constructive work. They had stepped into the very heart of a tragedy of destruction, and were quietly building up, building up, building up — and with no blast of trumpets. She learnt that they were doing the same in the devastated parts of France; and later she was to learn that wherever the tragedy of destruction spread its terrible net, the Friends were there to help the victims of the war, and to show their deep-seated faith in the power of love to alleviate and heal, and uplift. The building of the hut, the employment of the men, the housing of the refugee family was but a symbol. The meaning touched her to the quick. Before she had left the scene she had decided that she must add a cottage to the number. She announced this news to Gertrude Linton.

"Make it two," her friend said. "Make it two whilst you're about it. Plenty of precious stones in that safe, you know, waiting to be turned into ready money. I promise not to tell Bramfield if you make it two!"

They did not visit the main camp that afternoon. Miss Linton wanted Tamar to see it first on a week day, when the workrooms were open and the life was in full swing. But numbers of children came to the Friends' quarters for games in which the workers joined. The children were extraordinarily silent. No merry voices rent the air.

"I shall not be content," Gertrude Linton said, "until they are really happy as children ought to be. But they are happier than they were. You should have seen their sad, puzzled, bewildered faces at the beginning. Then you'd know the difference."

Certainly she and her comrades put in a good deal of work that afternoon to produce the results she desired. She was untiring in her efforts to rouse and interest them, and played games with them with the same dash and vivacity characteristic of her on all her more serious undertakings. Tamar again admired and envied her easy ways with these little refugees and the confidence she inspired. She had a smile and a pat on the head for each of them, and a flow of patois mysterious and mixed but evidently understandable, and an extraordinary memory for their names and histories and the towns or villages they came from. Six little orphan brothers and sisters from Antwerp were her special care and thought. They were always near her, the tiniest in her arms sometimes, with a doll dangling head foremost. The proceedings terminated with the gramophone, the children's greatest joy. They crowded up to the open windows of the Friends' hut, as close as they could get. If they had dared, they would have scrambled in. Tamar from within looked upon a sea of heads and eager faces. They were

packed like sardines, and did not stir an inch. It was evident that the gramophone could not tire them out, and that it had the same comforting fascination for them as for our wounded soldiers in a hospital ward.

The next morning Tamar and Miss Linton were starting off to call on the Commandant, who was himself going to show them the camp, when the vegetable cart drawn by a big, proud dog arrived before the Friends' house, and a good deal of lively bargaining of a friendly nature took place between the owner and the Friends, surrounded by the refugee residents from the cottages, who also wanted to bargain and buy. When this exciting function was over, Tamar and Miss Linton hurried off to the Commandant's office. He was waiting for them, and they at once began a tour of inspection.

About six thousand refugees were then being housed at Uden, in long, low barracks, divided into separate partitions for each family. They dined in large rooms capable of holding about a thousand each. There was a hospital, a church, and a school and a town hall, the abode of the Burgomaster. Long stretches of these barrack buildings on a waste of sandy soil gave rather an impression of dreary desolation; but Tamar, remembering the sights she had seen in the early days, could only marvel at the ordered care and detailed concern evolved by the generous Dutch out of an apparently hopeless chaos of difficulties. Here at least the refugees had a chance of living decent, respectable lives, and were housed, fed and kept in circumstances approaching as nearly as possible to normal conditions. And best of all, the children were being cared for in a very special way which did honour to the Dutch. They had borne

it in mind that the true hope of any country lies in its children; and so in Uden they were safeguarded, well looked after and well taught.

The Commandant seemed as anxious about their welfare as that other Commandant at Rosendaal, who had almost wept because there were no dolls for the children. He took Tamar to the hospital and showed her with pride the babies lying in their cribs outside, under the pine trees. He evidently loved the little ones, and was bent on helping to make them grow up strong.

"And you see," he said, "the situation is a healthy one for them, isn't it? One of the healthiest spots in Holland."

He spoke admirable English and liked to be congratulated on his fluency. He liked also to air it, and left Tamar and Miss Linton reluctantly to go off and see some big-wig member of the Government who had arrived unexpectedly.

"But I could not leave you in better hands," he said to Tamar. "Miss Linton knows all about us. And be sure that she shows you the schools. And ask the Sister to make the little ones sing to you."

To the school house they went, and made the acquaintance of the schoolmaster, who showed them the boys' class-rooms in a dour kind of way, and did not seem disposed to answer questions or impart interesting information about his refugee pupils. So they were glad to be handed over to the gentle and friendly Flemish Sister in charge of the girls.

She welcomed them with open arms and was delighted to talk with them about the children, and knew their histories and their circumstances by heart. Yes, this little one from Liège had lost her sisters and brother, and

her father was at the Front, and her grandmother had died during the flight to the frontier. And this little fair-haired one from Antwerp, so quiet and sensible, too quiet and sensible for her tender years, had piloted her sick mother and her wee brothers and sisters to safety, and assumed responsibility for their welfare, as if she were head of the family. And, as Mademoiselle Linton well knew, she was proud beyond words of the house assigned her so kindly by the Friends who thought she deserved a separate home for her brood. No one grudged it to her. The workmen who put it together rejoiced to think that *la petite* Jeanne and her family were going to inhabit it. Would the other English lady like to speak to Jeanne? Yes, Tamar said she would.

But when she tried to say a few words to the brave little one, she found she could not speak. Something clutched her at the throat. Something dimmed her eyes. It was Gertrude Linton who was able to make appropriate matter-of-fact inquiries after Jeanne's household, in a voice which did not falter and in that celebrated mixture of patois and Lintonese which as usual did not fail. Tamar, who could have almost counted on one hand the times when she had shed tears, nearly wept as she thought of that child's endurance and quiet heroism.

They visited several of the class-rooms, heard some of the lessons, exchanged smiles with the Sisters, who were pleased and gratified with their interest in the children, and came finally to a class-room where the nun who was conducting them, bade them wait for a moment or two whilst the children sang to them. She charged them to sing their best for the English ladies who were

their friends, their own friends and the friends of their beloved country. They stood up, and at a sign from her their young voices rose. They sang "*De Leeuw van Vlanandren*," their national song, and one or two of the verses of Rubens's Cantade.

It was unspeakably touching to see and hear all these homeless little exiles singing their home songs in a strange land. They of course knew nothing of the pathos of the scene, nothing of the appeal they made to their listeners. Very surprised and wondering would they have been, if they had been told that the memory of their little figures, their eager faces, and the songs they sang, would be an abiding recollection, sad — yet consoling. For there was consolation in the thought *that they were safe*, and that everything was being done for them that could be done by the generous neighbouring nation which had given them sanctuary. The nun knew some of the emotions stirred up in the hearts of the Englishwomen. She whispered:

"It is a joy to hear them and a sadness too — my poor little homeless ones."

"You make their school life almost like their native country for them," Gertrude Linton said kindly. "Nowhere else in the camp does it feel so homelike and happy as here with the Flemish Sisters. Such a beautiful work to do for them."

The Sister's face lit up with a smile of almost divine tenderness and protection.

"Ah, Madame," she said, "to know them safe here after all they have passed through, after all we hear of the terrible fate of those in the power of the enemy. What would one not do and be for them?"

As they passed into the corridor, she pointed to the

long row of clogs outside the class-rooms, and seemed delighted when Miss Linton snapshotted the quaint picture. But a still greater delight awaited her: for the schoolmaster came to tell her that a photographer had arrived to make a few pictures of the camp for illustrations in one of the Dutch newspapers, and that the Commandant wished him to begin with the school children.

In a moment all was bustle and excitement. All the boys and girls were sent into the school yard and herded together against the school house, the only grown-up people being the Reverend Mother and the Sisters, who intermingled with them and added to the picturesqueness of the scene. They placed the smallest ones in front, so that not a single head might be missing. Miss Linton and Tamar helped to arrange them, and the Commandant himself strolled up and looked through the camera once or twice, to make sure that all was well. He stopped the proceedings to add to the group an atom of a boy in a striped blouse, who was sucking his thumb just outside the range. Then he looked again, nodded approval; and there was a flash and a bang — and the deed was done.

"It will be a lovely and a clever picture," he said. "And what shall we call it?"

"The Dutch caring for the strangers within their gates," Tamar said instantly.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," he said, turning away.

Afterwards Miss Linton and Tamar strolled through the camp by themselves and chatted with various officials, including the tall and imposing Dutch policeman, who, like the Commandant, was delighted to air his

English, though in his case his eloquence was limited to two or three phrases such as: "All right," "Good morning!" Tamar noticed numbers of young men lolling about doing nothing, or else playing cards, in the barrack compartments. At that time conscription in the Belgian Army had not come into force; and there were apparently hundreds of Belgians even in that one camp, who had no desire or ambition to fight for their country. It was a piteous spectacle to see them thus bored, listless, probably stunned by what they had passed through, and with no energy to find occupation for themselves.

There were workshops of various kinds for tailors, shoemakers, basket makers, brush makers, smiths and tinsmiths; and in the women's workrooms the knitting industry was carried on, together with rug-making, raffia-work, fine needlework and mattress making.

It was to the Friends' Workroom or *Zaal* that Gertrude Linton now took Tamar, where she was supposed to justify her visit to Holland by rendering aid of which she was entirely incapable. Rug-making and fine needle-work did not form part of Tamar's equipment in life; but, as Miss Linton said, she could at least criticize and offer a few vague remarks when the woman showed her what they were doing.

"Look very wise and say very little," Miss Linton enjoined, "and they'll all think you are an expert of experts. They will love to talk to you, and you must pretend to understand all they say. It's very simple. All they want is kindness and encouragement. Remember how well you managed with Marie Louise, and Madam Guérin and the baby."

It was an interesting scene to see all the young, mid-

dle-aged and even old women happily at work, either making wool rugs or else engaged on needlework of some kind. They were delighted to be employed, and there was an atmosphere of content and happy peacefulness in the room, which was in itself a tribute to the Friends who had started this industry, and to the individual kindness and tactfulness of the helpers. It is certain that a spiritual gratitude reigned in that busy Zaal. The girls and women were not only interested in their separate tasks, but thankful that their lives had been arranged for them and that they had something to do.

And the Friends had established good discipline without a trace of mechanical tyranny. A new value had been put on the meaning of work; a new outlook had been quietly but deliberately insisted on. It was this: the women had to deserve to work; they had to behave themselves; they had to care to be industrious; only on those conditions could they be allowed the privilege of working. Tamar learnt that the unruly were punished simply by banishment from the Zaal, and that two or three of the troublesome spirits who had been shut out in the cold, came and looked in at the windows longingly day after day, until they were again admitted — when they sinned no more.

Tamar passed amongst them with Miss Linton, admired their handiwork, smiled at them, and was received by them all in most friendly fashion. There were three or four of the Friends' helpers superintending the work, pleasant, sympathetic, capable young women, looking cheerful and attractive in pink overalls. A delightful relationship of confidence had evidently been established between them and the refugees.

Tamar was told some of the histories of the refugees. One young woman from Aerschot, with a sad wistful face, was pointed out to her, whose father, three brothers and a cousin of sixteen years, had been deliberately taken out and shot when the Germans arrived in this peaceful village. Aerschot was one of the places which suffered most in the early days from German cruelty; and Julia Gyseman's tragedy, like that of Madame Guérin, was but one of scores occurring in that village alone, where every third man was shot at once. Another woman, Clementina Peeters, had lost her baby, who had died in her arms during the terrible days of flight towards the frontier. A pretty young girl from Visé, who was making a wool rug from a design of the Royal Arms of Belgium, was entirely alone in the world. So far, all attempts to trace her family had failed. Tamar ordered that rug, and had the satisfaction of seeing her face light up with a smile. She was working at full speed, as one almost possessed.

"Carolin Bertels scarcely ever speaks," Miss Linton said. "She only works. She is one of the girls to whom this place has been a godsend. I think she would have gone mad without it. She was the first to come to us. If you could have seen her then, you would not know her now."

Yet even Carolin Bertels joined sometimes in the songs which rose up in the workroom. She joined now when some of the gayer spirits at the farther end of the room started a well-known tune.

"I've never before heard Carolin sing so lustily," Miss Linton said. "That's because you've ordered one of her rugs. Make it two, T. Scott! Plenty of precious stones in that safe waiting to be turned into ready

money. I won't tell Bramfield if you make it two — or three!"

Before they left the workroom, they visited the special corner where some boys who had begged to be admitted, were busy making hempen shoes. Tamar learnt that when they were too naughty, the magic doors were closed to them. But naughtiness passed by easy stages into penitence, and from penitence into faithful co-operation. She also learnt that at Uden all wages were paid not in money but in "points"— discs, some of which were banked by the authorities for the future, whilst the rest could be exchanged for goods in the camp, but could not be used in any other way.

After Tamar's first introduction to the Friends' Zaal, she often slipped in there and sat amongst the women, and nearly always near those who had been pointed out to her as specially sad and desolate. They looked for her coming. They thought she was very beautiful. Bramfield would have been pleased to hear this and to know, therefore, that she was at her best.

He came in a day or two. He had seen the American Legation at The Hague and had learnt the good news that the Germans were going to sanction an inspection of their prisoners' camps by an Official American Medical Mission. As Döberitz was on the list of the camps to be visited, Bramfield had reason to hope that he might receive direct tidings of Bruce. He knew that his friends would leave no stone unturned to relieve his mind, and so he was in good spirits and prepared to enjoy himself, with that remarkable quality of resilience which was part of his temperament.

He would, of course, have liked to have slipped in with

that Medical Mission; but this would have been impossible. But, as subsequent events proved, the idea of getting into Germany by hook or crook and making his way to Döberitz was born in his mind. He was by nature reckless and daring, and impossibilities never deterred him from his aims. He had been educated at Heidelberg, and he knew German well, and had always travelled and stayed a good deal in the country, for business and pleasure. He was quite capable of making a dash into Germany on his own account and trusting to his luck. But for the moment, he was content to wait developments and hear the report and experiences of the Mission, reflecting, no doubt, that the information which the Americans were likely to bring back, would aid him in carrying out his secret scheme, which was to help Bruce to escape.

Tamar was delighted to see him and ready to do anything he suggested. He and Miss Linton whisked her off to two or three other refugee camps; and they went also to visit the English airmen who were interned in a fortress, and saw the Commandant who had forgiven the boys for digging a tunnel of escape, and had been photographed in it in his pyjamas! The airmen welcomed their English visitors with real joyfulness. They were bored and sick at their bad luck, and horribly disgusted at having their wings clipped. They were not allowed, of course, to send letters or documents, but they loaded Tamar and Bramfield with messages to their people, which they were to deliver the moment they touched English soil. Sad and wistful looked the young fellows as they waved their last good-byes. Tamar thought of her friend Tom, and was thankful to know that he was at large, and free to do nose-diving, looping-the-loop

and all the many other "stunts" with which he had bewildered her brain.

It was when they drove to Nynwegen, a frontier town about fourteen miles from Uden, where they caught a glimpse of the Rhine and the German Landwehr soldiers, that Tamar got a first inkling of the thought that was in Bramfield's mind.

"Easy enough, I should say, to get into Germany," he remarked quietly.

"Yes, but not so easy to get out, I should imagine," she said. "Do you want to go into Germany?"

He made no answer.

They journeyed to another frontier, Gennep, the scene of much smuggling, many thrilling escapes, and many terrible tragedies; for not all of those who were making a dash for liberty, were able to avoid the snare of the barbed and electric wire with which the Germans trapped their victims. Gertrude Linton showed them a photograph of a dead man caught in that mesh, which told its tragic tale only too vividly. But she told them that there had been many successful ventures only lately, and that numbers of Belgians had gained the river and miraculously missed being shot whilst swimming to safety.

"If they had luck, other people could," Bramfield said, half to himself.

"What do you mean by that, Bramfield?" Tamar asked sharply.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered, with a smile.

"Yes, you do mean something," she said almost fiercely. "You want to go into Germany to get to Bruce. That's what you're after."

"How do you know it?" he asked.

"I know it and feel it," she said.

"Tamar," he said, "I cannot tell you how I long to break down all barriers and get at that boy. Sense or no sense, that's how I am feeling. Do you understand?"

For answer she put her arm through his and made him turn his back on Germany and look towards Holland, as if she feared he would be tempted, then and there. Her anxious concern for him testified to her real love for him, and comforted him not a little.

"Do you care all that much?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, "you know I do. Promise me not to do anything absurd, Bramfield. I could not bear it."

"Do you care all that much?" he repeated.

"Yes," she answered again, "you know I do. But I cannot go on saying it an indefinite number of times. Now promise me."

"I will promise to try and not do anything absurd," he said. "That's all I can promise."

And she had to be content with that.

They heard all sorts of amusing smuggling stories, but the one which pleased Tamar most, was that of the German baby who arrived in Holland in normal condition, and returned to the Fatherland alarmingly increased in bulk and weight, having been padded with soap! It was interesting to hear of cows manœuvred quietly over the frontier by means of a plentiful ration of salt to lick and enjoy in a languishing forgetfulness of outer circumstances. She heard so many stories that, with all her experiences crowding one upon the other, she forgot some of the best. Often she found

herself saying: "I must try and recall every single detail in order to tell Seymour and the others in Ward Z." She sent Seymour some postcards about which Bramfield pretended to be jealous, though he ended by buying a number himself and giving them to her with the words:

"For that jewel friend of yours — my rival, whom I must slay when he has recovered."

But he was proud and delighted to know that she was visiting a hospital and taking an interest in the wounded. Until then, she had not told him. She always hid, as if they were some shameful conspiracies, any kindly deeds she had braced herself up to do.

Charming was Bramfield's relationship with Tamar in these days. His sunny, unselfish nature made everything easy for her, in an intimacy which demanded nothing she could not give. There was not even the strain of silence between them on the subject of her reluctance to marry him.

"The great thing is that I have got you, my Tamar," he said. "You can't do without me, and I can't do without you. That is something big to have won out of life. Who knows, if we married, we might have a deadly quarrel over diamonds which you don't appreciate properly, or over that wretched old char of yours, who divides her fidelity between you and the gin bottle."

"Gin or no gin, she has been faithful to me for fifteen years," Tamar said staunchly. "And I won't have any one say a word against her."

"There now, you see," he said, with a laugh, "we're beginning already. Heaven help us if we ever were to get married!"

And he teased her.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like to run up to Alkmaar and have some *schaper-kaas* and *pekel-haring* with a certain Weduwe Maas at Egmond op den Hoef?" he asked mischievously. "Are you sure you wouldn't like to buy another Dutch ship with a reconstructed —"

"Bramfield, don't!" she pleaded. "I can't bear to think or talk of that episode."

"But you are never going to insult me again, are you?" he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I hope not," she answered. "But one never knows."

They visited Rotterdam again and sought the offices of the American Relief Commission, where the work of sending food to the Belgians in Belgium was still going on successfully. The Representative and his wife had returned to America, and all the personnel had changed with the exception of one of the Belgian clerks whose brother had made his way back to Ghent to find traces of his mother and sisters — and had never returned. The vessels were still arriving safely, laden with grain and salt and rice and canned milk; for in those days there was no torpedoing of Relief Ships. But the effort of keeping up the supplies month after month, was becoming a serious matter, and the Americans were beginning to find relations with the Germans more and more difficult as the German grip on Belgium tightened.

But though that gracious company had gone, the memory of each one of them made Rotterdam a meeting place of friendships never to be forgotten, and conjured up emotions destined to stand the wear and tear of time and space.

They finished up at Uden, and Tamar spent the last two or three days in the Friends' Zaal amongst the women — to justify her journey, so Gertrude Linton put it.

"And very well you've managed, T. Scott," she said. "You've looked wise, and nodded or shaken your head to perfection when the girls have shown you their work. That's the way to do things. Look wise and say nothing, and the world will take you for a prophet or a genius or an expert. All the workers think you are an awful 'knut.' It is a good thing you are going. My nose would soon be out of joint."

The morning she left, the whole Zaal followed her to the door and circled round her, telling her to make haste and come back again from England. Bramfield, who witnessed the scene with the same pleasure which he always showed when Tamar was appreciated, said:

"Well, one thing is plain, my Tamar; you have not been sulky and disagreeable in Uden."

"Those forlorn and homeless refugee women have moved me very much," she said, as if in excuse.

At Flushing they learnt that exchanged civilian prisoners from Germany and England would be passing through Holland the next day. Gertrude Linton was one of the Reception Committee for the British, and through her influence Bramfield and Tamar shared the glad, though sad, opportunity of welcoming and taking care of the poor fellows from Ruhleben, who looked more than half starved, were scantily clothed, and seemed broken in health and spirit. One or two were out of their mind. The difference between their condition and that of the Germans from England, who arrived well clothed and well fed, was enough to make

all British beholders weep from grief — and rage. Gertrude Linton could scarcely control Bramfield from causing a scene. She appealed to Tamar.

"Do make your wretched Bramfield behave," she whispered. "We can't afford to have a disturbance here. It would never do."

"Bramfield, do try and not make a fool of yourself," Tamar enjoined, in a voice which was none too certain.

The sight of the contrast maddened him, as the sight and the memory of it maddened others for many a long day. Only Tamar could have calmed him.

She herself was never to forget that scene. Never was she to forget the moment when she handed a rose to one of the frailest invalids, and his face lit up with a smile of ecstasy.

"Roses," he said, "the loveliest flower of the loveliest land in the world."

Nor was Tamar ever to banish from her mind the remembrance of that quiet English lady who had kept a school in Brussels and had been seized and imprisoned under suspicion of being a spy, and only liberated when even the utmost hostility could not sustain the flimsy case against her.

"Is it possible," she said, with a light in her eyes, "that I am to see the shores of England again? Can you tell me that I'm not dreaming?"

No, they were not dreaming, those poor sufferers. Dawn had come in very truth, banishing despair and bringing a bright fulfilment of dim hopes.

Tamar parted with Gertrude Linton with the same regret that she always felt when she had to say good-bye to this exacting friend.

"Oh, I shall be over soon," Miss Linton said. "As

before, expect me at any time with any number of people to be housed, clothed and fed. Now, you have enjoyed yourself, haven't you? Are you not pleased you did not persist in being 'stuffy,' and remaining at home?"

"I have not minded coming," Tamar answered.

"Take your wretched old Bramfield in hand and make him keep calm about his boy and everything else," Gertrude Linton enjoined. "There is nothing to be done about Bruce for the present. I'll keep in close touch with the Legation and let him know all the news. Couldn't you possibly manage to marry him soon? That would keep him quiet for a while."

Tamar laughed her soft little laugh.

She had some difficulty in persuading Bramfield to leave Holland. Though he wanted to go with her, he also wanted to stay behind, in order to be on the spot to receive news of Bruce. But he gave in and journeyed home with her. They had no further experiences except the arrival of a spy at Tilbury — an Austrian woman this time — and a narrow escape from a floating mine, and a thrilling bit of companionship with four Belgians and one young Englishman who, after innumerable adventures, including five weeks' hiding in a monastery, had arrived at the frontier, and at the eleventh hour nearly got shot in swimming across the river.

"But you see they did not get shot, my Tamar," Bramfield said stubbornly, when talking with her over the story.

Tamar was worn out with all her adventures and emotions, and slept uninterruptedly for many hours.

She was awakened at length by the old char, who stood over her saying:

"Times is changed, times is changed and no mistake. Never did I see the like this fifteen year and more. A shop full of customers and no one to attend to them."

CHAPTER VI

TAMAR was tremendously stimulated by her visit to Holland, but rather thankful to be quietly settled in her own den again and to share in the repose which England was still enjoying at that time, and indeed for many long months afterwards, before the home people began to realize that a war was really going on in which their country had great stakes. As Bramfield truly said, politicians and the public were all comfortably asleep, and the only persons who were awake were the profiteers, and they had never closed their eyes from the outset.

She sank for a while into this blissful condition of peacefulness, and had a spell of ecstasy over her precious stones and a rather severe attack of graspingness and commercial sharpness, as if to make up for three weeks' neglect of all business interests. Then she relaxed and became more human. The day after the pendulum had thus swung back, an exceedingly handsome young woman, obviously of the so-called upper class, beautifully dressed and in faultless taste, pranced into the shop and produced from her dainty satchel a small round box from which she took what appeared to be a superb emerald. She said she wished to sell it.

Tamar gave a swift, professional glance at her visitor, sized her up as being a person who was in some pressing difficulty, examined the stone carefully, and looked at the little round box, which seemed to take her fancy.

"That is an interesting box," she said. "What is it made of?"

"Pith of the lime tree," the young woman answered. "There's a faint smell of the lime."

Tamar sniffed at it and nodded her head.

"I should like to have it," she said. "I should like to buy it — for a trifle."

"I came to sell the emerald, not the box," the young woman said impatiently.

Tamar glared at her and then said with an irritating unconcern:

"Oh, yes, the emerald. I'd forgotten it. How much are you expecting for it?"

"I am willing to take £150 for it," was the prompt answer.

Tamar laughed softly.

"Do you know," she said, in an amused tone of voice, "I don't run this business for charity."

"The emerald is worth far more than £150," the young woman said, her hand trembling from annoyance and impatience. "I know that absolutely for certain. But I need £150 at once, and so would let it go for that sum."

"No one has ever been here to sell something who did not need a certain fixed sum urgently," Tamar said quite good-temperedly. "But no one has ever got it. And why not?"

"Well, I suppose because you beat every one down," the young woman answered, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Partly that, of course," Tamar replied, with one of her grim smiles. "But also because in nine cases out of ten, the demands of the people desirous of selling

are based on an ignorance which is both amazing and amusing. Now and again, of course, they undervalue their property. I've known some remarkable instances. But I shouldn't be able to add you to them."

"I know for certain that the stone is a valuable one," the young woman insisted petulantly. "It is said to be a particularly beautiful emerald."

Tamar turned it over, examined it afresh and held it up to the light, but in a leisurely, perfunctory fashion, as if she were playing with it rather than bestowing any serious consideration on its merits or shortcomings.

"It is rather a beautiful colour, and its brilliancy is not at all bad," she said at last. "But unfortunately it is only a reconstructed emerald. Its value is about sixteen or seventeen pounds at the most. If it had been a natural stone, it would have been worth round about £350."

"A reconstructed emerald!" the young woman exclaimed angrily. "I don't believe it."

"I don't ask you to believe it," Tamar remarked dryly. "I merely make the bare statement. You are at liberty to believe what you choose and take your reconstructed emerald elsewhere. I certainly have no use for it."

She added, whether to irritate, or else because she really wished for the little box:

"I wouldn't mind buying the little lime box for five shillings. I rather like it."

"It is not for sale," the Hon. Maude St. Clair Everard said haughtily.

She whipped up her property and was beating a retreat when Tamar detained her.

"If you will come into the inner room," she said, "I'll take the trouble to give you a lesson and show you the difference between a natural and a reconstructed stone. Then you won't have a second disappointment."

"I don't want a lesson," Miss Everard retorted. "I want to sell the stone. I must sell it. I must have a hundred and fifty pounds. I simply must. If I don't . . ."

She broke off. She became suddenly confused. She bit her lips and tried to control her feelings and maintain her dignity, but in vain. It was obvious that she was bitterly disappointed and disconcerted. She threw herself on the chair and burst into tears.

T. Scott watched her with a curious, detached interest. She knew the type well.

"A pressing bridge debt, I suppose?" she said dryly.

The girl — she was only a girl — looked up.

"How do you know?" she asked, half tearfully, half angrily.

"Oh, I generally know," Tamar said casually. "I know when people come to make a sacrifice for some one or something and are disappointed with what I offer them. And I know, too, when they are pressed for money or have lost at bridge. Directly I saw you, I said: 'Bridge.' Well, I repeat my offer. I will give you five shillings for the little lime box, and a lesson in precious stones. Very generous of me, and I don't know why I should take the trouble for you, unless it is that you are young. I rather like young people."

"I'm so awfully disappointed," Miss Everard sobbed.

"Most people are," Tamar said, in her grimmest way.

"I am — always. Once I was myself terribly disappointed over a recon . . ."

She broke off and dispelled the unwelcome vision of Weduwe Maas and a Dutch nef.

She pointed with a quiet imperiousness to the inner room and led the way, followed unwillingly by her victim, who apparently had no power to resist her influence. She signed to her to be seated and then opened the safe, from which, after a somewhat prolonged process of selection, she took two or three rings and a few unset sapphires, emeralds and rubies, some of them reconstructed, others natural stones.

"Now," she said, "here is a real emerald — a beautiful specimen. Contrast it with your priceless possession. I suppose you see no difference. No, you would not be likely to. But I'll explain to you if you'll leave off sobbing in that absurd fashion."

She explained simply and concisely the difference between reconstructed and natural stones, and dwelt a little on the qualities of hardness, colour, brilliancy and transparency, which she exemplified in the stones she had chosen for her lesson. And having brought her technical remarks to a close, one would have thought that she would have ceased talking, and dismissed her visitor. But she did nothing of the kind. It was probable that after her absence in Holland, she was excited at seeing her gems, and was carried away by renewed enthusiasm. Anyway, she continued to talk on the subject of precious stones, and became increasingly fervent until she reached a condition of entire rapture which was reflected on her face. For, in spite of the modifications which her character was undergoing, she would never

have been able to root out her dominant passion from the depths of her nature. So now she lost herself in a fairyland of delight. She poured out all her knowledge, all her love, in a voice thrilling with pride, crooning with tenderness, whispering with mystery. She had forgotten her audience. For the moment the outer world had ceased to exist for her. Certainly the Hon. Maude.

The girl listened, amazed, awed, uneasy. She was not particularly intelligent, and had only been moderately educated. A round of pleasures was her only conception of life. She was entirely without any power of continuous interestedness and concentration. But, for the life of her, she could not have moved from the inner room. She sat where Tamar had placed her, holding in her hand the despised reconstructed emerald on which she had set such a fictitious value, and with which she had planned to discharge a pressing bridge debt. Against her will, against her frivolous, shallow nature, she was arrested by Tamar's fire of enthusiasm. To her, gems had only meant objects of adornment, to be worn for display, or capable sometimes of conversion into money for convenient purposes. She had never heard, much less thought of, the meaning of a precious stone, its soul, its spirit, its mystery. Later she would laugh perhaps. But she had no inclination to laugh now. She remained subdued and patient, waiting with a vague resignation for the order of release.

It came at last. There was a ring at the bell. Maude Everard's minimum of attention collapsed instantly. Her heart leapt within her at the joyful prospect of immediate escape. But no. Tamar continued her rhapsody entirely unconscious of any disturbing

summons. There was another ring, and this time Mayfair human nature could stand the strain no longer. The victim took courage and spoke.

"Don't you hear some one at the door?" she said. "Some one has been ringing before."

Tamar stared at her vacantly, and then, in a dreamy way, as one only half roused from an ecstatic trance, vanished like a spirit into the shop, leaving the safe open.

The girl was going to follow, when suddenly the devil entered into her and tempted her. Wasn't this an opportunity for her? Why shouldn't she avail herself of it? Wouldn't she be a fool not to do so? How would it be if she took one of those rings which the woman had put at the back of the upper shelf — that rich, velvety emerald, for instance, worth several hundred pounds? Could she? Dared she? Yes, why not? It was such a chance. It would never come again.

She glanced round to make sure that she was alone, and then, without any thought of consequences, without a moment's hesitation, bent forward, snatched a ring and stuffed it in her coat pocket.

"If I don't move from here until she returns, she won't suspect anything," she thought, as her heart beat wildly. "If I were to rush off now, she might have her doubts. But if I stay, I'm safe."

And she kept on repeating to herself:

"If I stay, I'm safe. But, oh, dear, I wish I could go."

Suddenly she became frightened at what she had done, and wanted to restore the ring to its place; and if she had yielded immediately to this impulse, she could have saved the situation. But again the devil tempted her.

"No," she said, "I've got it. I shall keep it. It will be all right if I remain here. It's torture remaining. But if I stay, I am safe."

So she stayed on. She leaned back in the chair, continued to hold her reconstructed emerald in her hand, and stared intently at the little cupboard near the fireplace, full of small bits of valuable china. She hoped, in this way, to give the impression that she was entirely unconscious of the proximity of that open safe with its rich hoard of rare treasure. Certainly Sarah Bernhardt could not have acted the part better. Maude Everard, for all her trembling heart, looked the image of detached and guileless innocence. No human being would have thought that she had stolen a rich, velvety emerald, a "perfection" stone, and that it was reposing peacefully in her coat pocket.

Certainly Tamar did not, when she returned to the inner room. She returned, entirely transformed both in bearing and in expression of countenance. She was no longer a dreamy enthusiast caught by a mystic spell. She was absolutely of this world now, material, practical, and jubilant over an excellent bit of business which she had carried through in that brief interval. She was chuckling a little, pleased with herself, and proud to find her commercial capabilities by no means impaired by temporary disuse, even as a violin player might rejoice that his bow arm had lost none of its elasticity after a period of inaction.

Thus tuned up to material consideration, she suddenly became aware that she had left the safe open. In her concern and alarm she almost leapt towards it like a tigress, and closed it with a bang. She was furious with herself for her carelessness.

"A thing I have never done before!" she exclaimed angrily.

If Bramfield had come in at that moment, he would not have found Tamar looking beautiful. She looked fiendish, with all her worst qualities of suspiciousness, covetousness and meanness aroused to their fullest expression.

Maude Everard glanced at her and became terribly alarmed, but made a valiant attempt to remain calm — and succeeded. She rose leisurely, almost listlessly.

"I think I'll be off now," she said with an innocent smile.

"No, indeed, you won't," snapped Tamar. "Do you imagine I should be such a fool as to let you go without examining the safe? It was bad enough to leave it open, but to let you go without making sure that everything was intact — no, thank you. I'm not such a lunatic as that."

Her words struck terror into the girl's heart. She would have sold her soul at that moment not to have stolen that ring. But she was plucky enough to retain her outward composure. She knew that calmness was her best asset at such a crisis. And she tried to fortify herself in the belief that this awful woman would not find out her loss immediately. Afterwards she would, of course. But surely not now. No, she would not be likely to take out all the things from the very back of the safe and count them. There *was* that barest chance; and the girl built all her hopes on it, as with lynx eyes she watched T. Scott begin that torturing process of examination. It is possible that her quiet demeanour impressed Tamar favourably, for though

there was a settled grimness on her face, she turned to the girl and said, mildly enough:

"I know everything in this safe. As an astronomer knows his stars, so I know my jewels."

The girl's heart stood still from renewed fright. If she had dared, she would have confessed then and there, flung down the stolen ring suddenly, and made a dash from the danger zone before T. Scott could have detained her. But she had not the power. She was becoming paralysed from fear. All she could do, was to smile a sickly smile, watch her torturer — and hope against hope.

Tamar took her time. She went over every treasure carefully and deliberately, and nodded her head repeatedly, as if to signify her satisfaction that so far she had found all her possessions undisturbed. She even glanced reassuringly at her victim and said, with some sort of an attempt at sulky apology and explanation:

"You see, in my kind of business, one could not trust even one's dearest friend — if one owned such a doubtful article."

She did not put her hand at the back of the upper shelf. She passed on to the lower shelf. Then some idea must have occurred to her, and she returned to the upper shelf. She paused, rummaged, sorted, and nodded again. The girl gave a sigh of relief. She dared to believe that the situation was saved. But she was mistaken. She had been misled by that last nod.

Tamar turned away from the safe, and without looking up or uttering a word of warning as to her intentions, strolled casually towards the telephone. There she paused.

"I am sending for the police," she said slowly. "I

miss an emerald ring — the valuable emerald ring that I showed you."

She had already raised the receiver when the girl caught her hand and intercepted her.

"Don't — don't, I implore you," she cried. "I took it — I have it here — here it is — the temptation was too great — I couldn't resist it — I don't know how I could have done it — it was an impulse — indeed, it was — but it was such a chance — and I need the money so badly — I have to get a hundred and fifty pounds somehow — and I've been counting on that emerald which you say is reconstructed — I stole it on impulse, and I would have given worlds to have put it back at once but couldn't — I — I implore you — don't — don't disgrace me — have mercy on me — here is the ring — you see, here it is — take it and let me go — don't — don't — disgrace me."

She clutched at Tamar's hand, at her arm, at her dress. In her agony of mind she knelt to her.

"Fool, worm," Tamar hissed out. "Did you suppose I shouldn't know? Why should I have mercy on you? What are you to me? What are your contemptible bridge debts to me? Why shouldn't I disgrace you? Get up. I don't want any one to kneel to me. If you knelt to me a thousand years, it would not make the least difference to me."

The girl got up and stood before Tamar in a mute despair. No further words passed her lips, no tears ran down her cheeks, no sobs escaped her. She had made her appeal, and she knew she had failed, and nothing remained for her except despair, humiliation, exposure. She recognized Tamar's inexorableness as something fixed and final.

But the very intensity of her hopelessness, and her almost tragically swift acceptance of an intended unmercifulness presented to Tamar a petition far more likely to be granted than any further outburst of hysterical pleading. She realized that this stranger who knew nothing of her, had gauged her natural pitilessness and felt that all effort against it was futile. The thought gave Tamar pause. She did not quite like it.

Was she, then, so cruel? Did she give the impression of being entirely unreachable by human distress? The girl, of course, ought to be disgraced, deserved to be disgraced. But she had not definitely said that she was going to disgrace her. She had only said that if she went on kneeling a thousand years it would not make any difference.

Nor would it.

What would make a difference was that she was young — and with her life before her — and that she had acted on impulse — it was obvious that she was not a professional thief, but a frivolous fool of a society girl — an odious type — but young and with all the appeal of youth about her — suppose now it had been Marion, or Dorothy, or Winifred or any of those young things circling round her — and it had been a temptation — Tamar herself by her own carelessness had actually placed the temptation in the minx's way — a temptation — and if one began to think about temptations — well . . .

And suddenly a very curious thing happened. The shop bell rang, and Tamar, having transfixed her victim with a glance, went to the door and found Inspector Winifred Thornton, looking more imposing and official than ever in her smart uniform.

"Please stay here in the shop," Tamar said, with a nod of welcome. "I'll be back in a moment."

But as she hurried to the inner room, the remembrance of her own great temptation in Winifred's home, in the library, smote her like a blast. She recalled how she had stolen the pearls, restored them, stolen them again, put them back once more — and then fled because she could not trust herself. She could not boast.

No, she could not boast.

"Go," she said to the girl in a voice that trembled. "Go, before I repent. Be off with your reconstructed emerald — and don't dare show your face here again."

The girl raised her head with a jerk. Her eyes shone. The buoyancy of youth returned to her as if by magic. And without even glancing at Tamar, she fled instantly from the room, with the precipitancy of a young animal suddenly released from the chain. But, to her unspeakable horror, a policewoman was stationed at the door barring the exit. The rôle of custodian of the peace fitted Winifred to a nicety. No one in the whole universe looked and was more suitable for the position.

The girl uttered a low cry of alarm, and stood stock still.

But Tamar who had followed her, said:

"You needn't be frightened. She hasn't come to arrest you — but to free you. Be off."

She escaped.

Winifred turned to Tamar immediately she had gone.

"Do tell me what it all means," she said. "I should be so interested psychologically."

"I daresay you would," Tamar answered, but she

gave no explanation; and Winifred never knew what part she had unconsciously played in that little drama.

Two or three mornings after this incident, Tamar received by post the little round lime box to which she had taken such an absurd fancy. There was no message enclosed in the packet, but none was needed to explain the significance of the gift.

"So the minx was grateful," mused Tamar. "Well, she had her lesson in more ways than one. And I tortured her. I tortured her well, with that long-drawn-out searching of the safe. She must have suffered agonies of uncertainty — poor little wretch. I'm not sure, not quite sure that I should have let her off, if Winifred had not appeared at an opportune moment to strengthen my sudden remembrance of my own temptation over those four pearls."

CHAPTER VII

TAMAR had occasion to go to Bradford to attend an important auction sale, of which Bramfield, ever watchful on her behalf, had notified her. Rupert who was in town at the time, reminded her that Lallington was not far from Bradford, and charged her to go and see his mother, who had been seized with a sudden longing for her old home, and had abandoned Bloomsbury for a little while. He was joining her soon, he said but he had been feeling " fed up " with archaeology and with his own attempts at writing, and was rather wanting to get some definite war work to do in London, something in the Censor's Office, he thought, or failing that, something at the Red Cross, in the Department for the Missing, which appealed to him specially.

" I could do that," he said rather pathetically, glancing at his disabled arm and leg. " I should be of some use then in this old war which has come to stay."

" But you have done your part, more than done it," Tamar said.

" Yes, but one wants to go on doing it in some sort of crocky old way, if one can," he said with a smile. " I thought I shouldn't want to. But some of the things which have been happening lately have upset me tremendously. That murder of Edith Cavell, for one. And as the news from the Front comes in, sometimes good, sometimes bad, I tell you I don't know how to bear myself. I want to be everywhere, in France, in

Flanders, at Kut, at Gallipoli — anywhere so long as I am in it."

There is no doubt that he had been feeling increasingly his enforced inaction; and Tom's departure had stirred him up and unsettled him. Dorothy's absence also had added to his unrest. But he bore it quite uncomplainingly, and spoke to Tamar now with pride and pleasure of the work she was doing in Belgium with her Corps.

"If she doesn't get the Ordre de Leopold II, I refuse to marry her when she wants me to," he said. "I've told her that plainly. Meanwhile I must get some things together for the one and only home, if we are ever to have one. How about this Limoges enamel? Wasn't that the plaque she admired so much?"

"Yes," Tamar said. "But it isn't for sale, Mr. Rupert. It is going to be my wedding gift to her when the time comes."

His face flushed with pleasure.

"But I know you like it and prize it," he said. "You said at the time you would part with it very reluctantly."

"Well, so I shall," she answered. "But all the same, it's going to beautify that one and only home, when the time comes."

It was remarkable how she had gradually identified herself with the interests of the Thornton family. In the course of her business life Tamar had visited homes all over England, and no single individual, no groups of people had ever meant anything to her. She had not given anything of herself to them nor received anything from them, probably because she had felt no need to give

or receive. But there comes a moment in the life of every one, however aloof, when a heart-hunger asserts itself and will not be denied. She must have been in this condition when she went to Lallington and found this family ready to like and annex her. If she had brought them news of good fortune, and offered them an interpretation of their father confirmed by his brief comment written in the corner of the old family paper, they had in exchange shown and handed to her hidden treasure, the value of which they did not realize any more than they had realized the worth of the precious stones she had priced for them — the treasure of new interests, young upspringing companionship, trust, confidence and the claims of friendship — priceless gems to those who have known something of the loneliness of middle age. Very grateful did Tamar feel to the Thorntons, one and all, and to Rupert specially, for his silence which she never forgot. She thought of it now when he asked her to go and see his mother. His words echoed back to her: "*Oh, it's nothing — only a little seed pearl of no value.*"

Since then, never for a moment had she felt uneasy, nor at a disadvantage with him on account of his personal experience of her graspingness. There was something large and noble in his nature, a spaciousness of understanding born of an idealism, which always reminded her of that young clergyman, Richard Forest, whom she had known in the past, and who had lost his life in saving the lives of others in a fire. Richard Forest had always seemed to her as one set apart. Rupert gave that same impression at times, and his interest in human affairs was often tempered by vague probings

and searchings for things that "met not the eye." An instance of this tendency occurred before he left the shop that day. He said to Tamar:

"I shall be curious to know what happens to you mentally when you go to Marton Grange again. I wonder whether you will have another definite conviction that there are further precious stones which we Thorntons have not been able to discover. It would be great to have more treasure, of course, though we really don't want more. But it would be positively thrilling if another 'wireless' were to come from my father to you — your spiritual kinship with him making it possible. That's the point which interests me. I care more and more about these subjects, and long to know more. Do you care? You must, I think. You are very psychic yourself."

"I have had moments, Mr. Rupert," she said dreamily, "but they have been rare. Such moments are rare. They steal on one unawares — like a thief in the night. One cannot prepare for them. If they come, they come. But I don't suppose I shall ever hold converse with your father again. There is no reason why I should."

"There might be," he said. "When I read your book, and note the name of any stone which you record as being dear to a collector's heart, though not valuable in any other sense, I often wonder whether you, by focussing on that thought, could put yourself deliberately in the pathway of the wireless. Suppose, for instance, you said: '*Well, we have not found dematoid.*' That is one of the stones you mention."

Tamar smiled. She loved to know that Rupert knew her book so thoroughly. Though she seldom spoke of it, no author, living or dead, could ever have been more

proud and pleased than she was over an assurance of appreciation.

"But, you see, Mr. Rupert," she said, "I should have had first to be convinced that dematoid, or essonite, or chiastolite, were necessary to your father's pride as a collector. He might have had any of them, of course. But I should not know, for the thought of them leaves me cold. But the flame-red spinel didn't. Anything but. It was the intensity of my belief — the burning intensity of it which let that message come through. Such a thing is not likely to occur again."

"Well, you will tell me exactly how you get on, and what feelings you had?" he asked.

She promised.

But his words and the thoughts they suggested haunted her. On her way up to Bradford she found herself "preparing for a moment" by enumerating the interesting gems which Mr. Thornton might have had, but which she did not remember to have found in his collection. Even during the auction sale, when her attention ought to have been entirely concentrated on her own affairs, she had a lapse of watchfulness, because she was saying to herself:

"*Did he by any chance have one of those sapphires which change from a blue colour by daylight to a purple by artificial light?*"

She lost a beautiful bit of china by this aberration, and was furious with herself, the auctioneer, the successful bidder, Rupert, his father, and all the Thornton family. She was so annoyed that she almost decided not to trouble to go to Lallington. But after she had secured some George II silver on which she had set her mind, she recovered her temper; and a telegram of wel-

come from Mrs. Thornton which awaited her at the hotel, made her content to carry out her original intention. When later she arrived at Lallington station, she was glad that she had come, glad to see the moors and the slopes with their belt of trees, and to feel the impact of the clean, strong air.

The little yellow 'bus was waiting to take passengers up to the village, but she let it go without her, for she had the impulse to call at the Station Hotel and inquire whether all was well with that soldier father in India and that brisk little daughter who was helping her mother so splendidly to run the business. Hetty Passmore knew her at once, whipped up her suit-case, and had soon whipped in a tempting tea-tray with some convincing Yorkshire buns.

"And what do you think?" she said, as she poured out the tea for Tamar. "Father is home safely. He's in hospital recovering from enteric, in the Second London General. Mother and I went up to see him, and we all cried together. It was so jolly. He's awfully weak and thin, but at least he is safe."

"I am glad," Tamar said, smiling at her. "Then you'll soon be having him here to see how well you've been looking after things in his absence."

"He pretends we can get on perfectly well without him," she laughed. "A sort of wax martyrdom, I think."

Mrs. Passmore looked in to see Tamar.

"So the rumour about the jewels was true, after all," she said. "The Thorntons came into a large fortune."

"Did they?" T. Scott said innocently.

"It was such a surprise to every one," Mrs. Passmore continued. "Every one thought Mr. Thornton was

only taken up with old bones and arrow-heads, and the like."

"Indeed," said T. Scott guilelessly.

"Men are deceitful and no mistake," Mrs. Passmore added. "You never know what they're up to. Always hiding up something. Still, I'm not saying that this particular bit of deceit wasn't innocent enough — and only a pleasant surprise for the family. I wouldn't have minded it myself. And yet they do say that Mrs. Thornton frets a good deal."

"Ah," said T. Scott vaguely.

"Think of it," said Mrs. Passmore, "pearls and diamonds and rubies and emeralds, and every jewel under the sun, and not so much as a little seed-pearl ever seen on Miss Winifred or Miss Marion."

"Very astonishing," remarked T. Scott, with increased woodenness. "People are astonishing."

And that was her only comment. She laughed silently to think that any one should attempt the hopeless task of drawing T. Scott. No human being existed who could have surprised Tamar's fortress of cautiousness. The Government ought to have commandeered her for the Secret Service.

Hetty Passmore, who was going to see some friends in the village, accompanied her up the hill. They lingered at the bridge, noted the turbulence of the rushing river swollen by recent rains, and then mounted the hill slowly. Five or six dogs went with them, for Hetty always had a retinue of collies, three of her own and two neighbours who invariably claimed the right to share her joyous companionship. They leapt round her at intervals and nearly knocked her down, a proceeding she appeared to enjoy thoroughly.

It was getting dark, and one by one the stars were declaring themselves. Tamar and her companion stopped to look at them, and to watch the outline of the moors grow dimmer and gradually merge into the mystery of the fading light. The life of the little mountain village was over for the day. No flocks of sheep, no herds of cattle were passing down the cobbled street. At the blacksmith's, where they paused to take breath, all was silence, and no children were playing round the old pump in the square. The lights in the cottages were carefully screened, the Defence of the Realm requiring darkness even in this out-of-the-way place.

Tamar felt a sense of desolation creeping over her. She wondered why she had come. Legends of the country instilled into her by the Thorntons recurred to her. She almost expected to feel Barguest, the soft-footed hound, brush against her. She thought that if he did, her hair, like that of the Passmores' old serving-man, would certainly stand on end and never come down for three whole days. Or was she perhaps going to see the old monk on his way to Marton Grange, where he would stand and look in through the Norman window, asking silently for admittance? And stay — was it not on this very spot that she had seen in her dream that tall man, with a thin face, and lantern-jawed, who had suddenly come round the corner by the blacksmith's forge and had said to her with a slight stutter:

"I've been expecting you to come. I want to show you my spinels, especially my flame-red spinel."

Was she going to see him now? She felt as if she were. And again she began "preparing for a moment" by speculating on the stones he might have had in his collection, but which had not been found. How

about a cinnamon-brown sphene, for instance? No, not very likely. Or a dematoid, after all? Or an axinite? No, not very likely, either. Oh . . .

Hetty Passmore's voice recalled her from the land of surmise.

"Here you are at the turning for Marton Grange," she said. "You can't miss it now. Good-night."

It was evident that Mrs. Thornton had been fretting. Tamar thought that she was probably anxious about Tom, who for some weeks now had been at the Front. There were traces of sadness on her face, and in her eye signs of painful searching for, straining after, something beyond her power of vision But as the evening wore on, she brightened up, and knitted busily as usual, whilst Tamar, in an arm-chair drawn up to the cosy fire, related her experiences in Holland; told her about the kind Dutch and their care of the children — those little strangers within their gates — and recounted all the tales she could remember of spies and escaped prisoners and smuggling. And where she could not remember she invented. She ended up with a spirited account of the fashionable young woman who stole the ring and was terrified when she saw Winifred unconsciously barring her exit from the shop.

This bit of news amused Mrs. Thornton more than anything.

"Winifred is a little terrifying sometimes even out of uniform," she laughed. "But in uniform — well, I think even Tom is impressed!"

She had received a letter from Winifred that morning saying that she had been promoted to the rank of inspector, and giving the good news that the Women

Police Service had definitely been appointed by the Ministry of Munitions to act as guards for certain factories.

"This is only one step," she wrote, "but it will lead to others, and we are sure that work will open out for us in many directions. I am to go to a factory where several thousand women are employed in the manufacture and disposal of the most dangerous explosive demanded by the war."

She had heard from Tom also, who said that he was all right, having the time of his life and making an intimate acquaintance with "Archie."

She was happy in her children and proud of what they were doing — one of those thousands and thousands of mothers who sent out their dearest with a blessing, to serve, to suffer, to return maimed — or not to return.

It was nearly midnight when they went to bed. Mrs. Thornton took Tamar to her room.

"It was kind of you to come," she said. "You've done me good. You always do me good."

"Isn't it rather solitary for you here alone?" Tamar asked kindly.

"If it is a little desolate at times, it is my own fault," she answered. "I wanted to come.

"The past called me," she went on. "Rupert did not wish to leave me, but I urged him to go to London. He longs for Dorothy, I know, though he says very little about his longing. His patience and chivalry always touch me. He is very chivalrous."

Tamar nodded thinking of the little seed pearl.

"He frets sometimes that he cannot take any active part in the war," Mrs. Thornton continued. "He did

not at first when he returned. He was too ill. But now that he is better, something is stirring in him again. Your friend from Holland fired him, as she fired all of us that night. And he could not forget the poor young Belgian woman. Nor could I. For days after, he kept on saying how terrible it would be if such a fate should overtake our country. And Tom's departure affected him greatly. He longed to go also. And I think he has been too much taken up with his father's book — yes, and with haunting thoughts of his father. I don't want that for him. So I sent him away."

She paused.

"The past is not for the young," she said. "The future is for them. But to the old, the past speaks sometimes — often — with a voice which cannot be silenced — which we do not want to be silenced. Good-night, dear friend. Your presence is a comfort to me. I shall sleep well tonight."

Tamar stood for a long time in thought after she had gone. She wondered at what stage in a person's life the past began to claim more than the future promised. She looked back over her own life, and realized that events and experiences which had made a profound impression on her at the time, had quickly lost their import for her. Would they regain their ascendancy, and when? When she was fifty? No, probably not, because at middle-age people were often able to review the past years critically, dispassionately, and with an aloofness and independence which inferred freedom from all bondage of thought. No, not at fifty. Well, at sixty, say? Ten years for the future to have failed in promise, and the present to have lost its hold and then a slow, silent, secret stealing back to the things of the

past, which by reason of the distant vision look on all the vague outlined beauties of a Promised Land. Perhaps not even at sixty.

She laughed at herself. Absurd to suppose that this stealing back could be dated, like those bonbonnières and silver she had secured at the Bradford auction sale. It depended on temperament, on one's power of longing, on the strength of one's regrets, on the thousand and one differentiations of mind and brain — and on one's arteries. That was what Bramfield was always speaking of — people's age depending on the condition of their arteries. Take Bramfield, now. He was nearly sixty. He had not begun to live in the past, nor to want it in any way. The present engrossed him and the future still beckoned to him, and would beckon for a long time. But then, he was of an exceptional nature, so bright and eager — almost boyish in his impetuousness.

Never had she been worthy of him. Never could she be worthy. But she said to herself that in her own way she loved him dearly, always more and more, not less, and that life without him would be unthinkable. If she were to lose him, would she then live in the past, no matter what her age, and pine for the joys out of her reach and the chances on which she had for so many years turned her back? In her eyes, then, as in Mrs. Thornton's now, would there be a searchlight, searching for something hidden in the mystery of death?

These thoughts and the questions they raised, passed from her mind and gave way to memories of the first night she had spent in Marton Grange. Once more she saw before her that beautiful collection of precious stones, stowed away in such curious hiding-places.

Once more those pearls she had coveted and nearly stolen, danced before her eyes. Once more the flame-red spinel shone for her like a bit of burning coal. And against all inclinations, for she was deadly tired, her mind reverted to her talk with Rupert, and she fell a-wondering afresh what other stones a passionate lover of gems might possibly have had in his collection.

"Not dematoid, not axinite, not . . ."

She fell asleep from sheer fatigue.

She awoke after an hour or two of entire oblivion; but the obsession renewed itself the moment she awoke and left her no peace. Yet no conviction forced itself on her as before. Vague surmises and conjectures alone presented themselves; but no guiding message was borne to her from the unseen world. Her own words to Rupert echoed back to her:

"Such moments are rare. If they come, they come. One cannot prepare for them."

She tried to rivet her thoughts elsewhere. She tried to think of Bramfield, of Bruce, of Gertrude Linton, of her last successful deal, of a crucifix which she might be able to fake up into Spanish seventeenth century.

But in vain. And at last, because she could not help herself, she threw on her coat and stole downstairs to the library.

There was not a sound to be heard in the house, except the ticking of the old hall clock. Outside, too, there was no sound. It was a calm, clear, star-jewelled night. Tamar looked through the window at the stars. Myriads of them there seemed, and how extraordinarily beautiful! Shimmering gem-stones by the myriad. Was that all she had come down to see? What exactly

had she come down for? Yet now here, a vision of those luscious sea-gems again rose before her, and she hungered for them as she hungered for them when her enchanted eyes first beheld them.

Supposing she were to find something entrancingly beautiful now — an emerald of a specially fine velvet, superb in itself and of great value — would she want to steal it in the silence and safety of the night, the stars alone as witnesses of her act? Perhaps she would. She could not say for certain she would not, not even after her true repentance and the acute realization of her shame. But she hoped she would not even be tempted. How splendid if she could say to Bramfield, who loved to know when she was at her best:

"Bramfield, I found a priceless emerald, secretly, in the silence of the night, and with no witnesses except the stars. And this time my only feeling was that of joy over its exceeding beauty. I had no impulse to steal it."

But it was not likely that she would be put to the test. There was nothing to be tempted over. Of that she felt sure. She would not even search for treasure. If there had been anything, she would have received tidings of it from her comrade in spirit — and sensed it. He had guided her to the spinels. He had guided Rupert to the old family document. He had probably yielded up the whole of his collection, and he had certainly yielded up the story of his soul.

There was no reason why she should have come, and no reason why she should stay; and yet she lingered, unable to leave. She sank into the armchair in the corner formerly occupied by the pile of papers and manuscripts under which she had found the old Bible-box.

The pile had gone. The Bible-box had also gone. But otherwise the room had not changed in aspect, nor had the feeling in the room changed. Tamar could imagine Mr. Thornton stealing into his den by night, making sure that he had locked the door, taking out one of those deceitful dummy volumes, smiling furtively as he did so, and placing it tenderly on his desk. Now he had opened it. And now he was putting the stones one by one on the table and revelling in their loveliness. Which of them had been his favourite? She would like to have known that. So real was the scene to her, that she nearly called out:

"Tell me which was your favourite."

She thought it was strange that he had left no record of his passion, and that not even a disjointed reference to it had been found, except in that old family paper. How had he been able to refrain from writing down some of the emotions which must have stirred him? Secretive though she was, she could not have refrained. She had to write that book of hers. She remembered now the intense relief she experienced when she set about doing it — she, too, who had not the habit of writing. Well, perhaps one day Rupert would find some stray list or memorandum somewhere, and then they might learn which had been his favourite gem.

But hush — what was that sound — that faint sound in the stillness of the night?

She started, tense and alert. She glanced towards the window where the old monk was supposed to stand and look in. Had he left his post? Was he entering the house? No, surely not. Something was stirring — some one was stirring. There were soft footsteps coming nearer and nearer. She could hear them now.

Her heart stood still. There was a creaking on the stairs. There was a traversing of the hall. There was a pausing on the threshold. There was a gentle fumbling at the door-handle.

Mrs. Thornton entered.

Tamar did not stir, could not stir. If she had to account for her presence there, all she could say, would be that she could not account for it — and it would be the truth. Then instantly it was borne in on her that there was no need to fear. Mrs. Thornton was walking in her sleep — yes, and weeping. Tamar heard the sobs amid the heavy breathing.

Like a troubled spirit she came, like a restless spirit she wandered around the room, and like a spirit she vanished. Had she come to her husband's Holy of Holies to find treasure, not pearls nor rubies nor any precious stones, but solace for memories, regrets, longings, lost chances — hidden treasure seldom found?

The next morning Tamar told Mrs. Thornton that she had not thought Marion looking well the last time she saw her at the St. Ursula Military Hospital, that Winifred, in spite of her elevation to the rank of Inspector, had complained of violent neuralgia, and that Rupert had said that he had entirely lost his appetite.

"He rather looked like it," Tamar said, closing her eyes, her usual trick when she was deceiving any one. "He is not fit for much war work yet, I should judge."

"Not taking his food," exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, in immediate concern. "That's very bad. The boy needs building up the whole time. And Winifred suffering from neuralgia just when she is going off to that muni-

tions factory, and Marion not herself either. Why did you not tell me last night, when we were speaking of them? "

"You mothers fret over nothing," Tamar said guilelessly. "I did not like to give you a restless night."

"I had that, in any case," Mrs. Thornton said. And a shadow came over her face. For a moment she was silent.

"But this decides me," she went on. "I shall return to London with you today."

"I should not hurry off if I were you," Tamar said. "There's no need for that. I am afraid I have made you unduly anxious. Stay at least a few more days."

She smiled inwardly as she spoke. She knew something about the value of opposition craftily and carefully applied.

"I shouldn't dream of it," Mrs. Thornton said, bustling up. "I'll go today. I cannot stay away when the children are ailing. It is then that they need me. We will have a motor and drive over the moors to Bradford and get the express from there. It is a lovely morning for a run, and you would enjoy it. I will telephone at once to the Station Hotel."

Tamar chuckled. She was as pleased with the results of her romancing as if she had concluded an admirable bit of business cheating. If it had not succeeded, she would have tried something else. She was not intending to leave Mrs. Thornton at Marton Grange to wander about in the night grieving, holding her hands out to the past — sobbing her heart out — unable to rest, even in her sleep. That was not to be borne. And the children must be told. They must not allow it.

Tamar never forgot that drive. She was not one of Nature's children, but that morning Nature, as if determined to win the alien who had ever been indifferent to her, put forth all her charms to attract and thrill and hold.

To the clouds she said:

"Show her the glory of your changing lights."

To the sun she said:

"Pour all your wealth of golden warmth on her."

To the air of the wild moorland she said:

"Caress her first, encircle her lovingly so that she may know you to be a friend, and then if you wish, put forth your strength and let her feel the wild impact and rush of your breath."

To the moors she said:

"Show her purple amethysts such as she has never seen before."

To the pasture uplands she said:

"Let her see our fields of fresh emeralds glittering in the sun."

To the mountain streams she said:

"Leap joyously, dear children, show her in what glad fashion the mountain streams dance down from the fells to greet the river."

And to the fells she said:

"Stand out in all your rugged grandeur. Be to her as symbols of greatness, free from the trammels of petty concerns below."

They raced over the wild moorland, always higher and higher, past grim boulders and mountain sheep and lonely shepherds' huts, past marshes sending out their salt-laden breath, and peewits circling overhead, and

here and there a stunted thorn tree which spoke of contests with the blast. Down dipped they now to the river, and passed through wondrous woods of many tints of green, and pastures where the cows were grazing and sweet villages sheltering in the dale; and once more gladly gained they the moors and came into the liberating joy of the wider spaces. And on and ever on they sped, until the glories of moor and fell and green slopes and smiling valley with its winding silver river were left far behind, and Nature had waved them her last good-bye.

CHAPTER VIII

TAMAR had been faithful to Marion's hospital. With the exception of the weeks she had been in Holland, she went regularly to see her friend Seymour, always taking something from her collection to show him, once a very beautiful alexandrite, once an interestting tin stone, and on other occasions several curious tourmalines and fine Egyptian peridots of good colour. Before he finally left St. Ursula's, she took him to Mr. Grierson, the lapidary, and Seymour's latest history was that he became a gem-cutter. She had made other friends in the ward, and news of her kindness to the men having reached the C.O., she was given a permit which was renewed from time to time, and thus became practically permanent. The ward had now no terror for her. No longer did she need to linger on the threshold and summon up courage to face the beds of sickness.

"Not that I shall ever like to be with ill people, Marion," she said sometimes with great surliness. "No 'churn up' could ever produce that change in me."

Marion only laughed. She knew Tamar's ways by this time.

As for the wounded soldiers, the churn up had long ago accustomed them to the changes going on in Blighty, and they had ceased to be astonished at what the women were doing in this particular hospital or anywhere. There was now no look of wonder on their faces when on arriving, they found women stretcher-bearers waiting for them. The novelty of having

women doctors to look after them and operate on them was no longer a subject of discussion, nor a cause for surprise, indignation or amusement. The story of the sergeant-major who, after weeks of sustained sulkiness and hostility, suddenly capitulated and on leaving wrote a handsome tribute to the care he had received and a handsome *apologia* for his ungraciousness, was like a legend of far-off days. If there was any talk now about women's new activities in all directions, it was chiefly confined to irritated speculation as to whether the women would be ousting men from their jobs. And in many cases it was entirely a dog-in-the-manger spirit that roused and encouraged this anxiety, for numbers of the men were always declaring that they did not intend to go back to their pre-war work.

"Catch me sitting in a bank all day!" said Private Greville, a bank clerk. Yet he was one of the most eloquent speakers on the subject of women depriving men of their work in banks and business houses.

There was always a good deal of talk about the labour outlook, labour unrest, labour intentions — and labour triumph. In Ward Z, Private Jones, a huge miner, a Yorkshireman, used to stand before the fire, as soon as he could stand, wave his arms about, and in a voice which could have reached to the uttermost ends of the earth, always finished up with:

"*I tell you, boys, the world is ours. The people are coming to stay.*"

There was, of course, endless talk about the delinquencies of the War Office — and no wonder. The delay in receiving payment, the inaccuracy of the amounts eventually received, the Herculean difficulties to be overcome before the corrections took place, if ever, were

favourite subjects which never failed to rouse the meekest, the most patient. Some were indignant, some resignedly amused, others bitter.

"So this is all a grateful Government can do for me — insult me and cheat me," said Private Black, an engine-driver, who had had really monstrous trouble over his pay. "Eleven shillings debit, when it ought to be four pounds three shillings credit. It makes a fellow downright mad. Now, mate, can you understand this statement?"

No one could. Probably no one was intended to. The brain of the most distinguished Senior Wrangler would have been baffled by the problem and the figures.

There was intermittent discussion about the war, but not nearly so much as one would have expected from the people who had actually been taking part in it. Now and again there rose up some one who was interested in it as a whole, and was able to take a comprehensive survey of all the operations in all the centres. Private Smith was of this ilk. He was a compositor, keen, enthusiastic and of informed mind. But for the most part, the men spoke of the work of their batteries or companies; and the destinies of nations concerned them not at all. Impersonal debate nearly always drifted into personal narration and reminiscence. When first men came from the Front, it was the news of the battalion that was wanted before the news of the war — human and natural enough, in all conscience.

"Well, how's old Fritz?" was one of the questions after more important topics had been dealt with.

"Oh, Fritz is being beaten, and he knows it," was the usual answer at first.

But later that was not the answer. It was:

"Fritz will take a devil of beating, but we'll do it yet, of course."

Of course. There was no doubt about that; but the time limit which started by being a few weeks, had stretched to another Christmas, another six months, another year, another two years — any old time.

They discussed their chances of being "boarded," and if discharged, their prospects. Was the country going to look after them properly, or cheese-pare them, or neglect them altogether, as in all previous wars, including the South African war? Private Johnson, in civil life a plumber's mate, was never tired of asking this question.

"No, sonnie," said Corporal Jenkins. "No fear of that. Times are changed. They've had to change, or the public would know the reason why. You'll get your pension right enough in ten years or so. Or perhaps they'll be offering you a place in the Government at five thousand a year."

"I'll take it," said Johnson, with a wink. "Perhaps I'd do just as well as some of those blokes there."

"In that case I shall certainly emigrate to Australia," said Rifleman White. "It would be safer there. Or Nova Scotia. What about prospects there, McIntyre? Any opening in the diving line for me there?"

McIntyre, who was a diver by profession and had a great flow of words, then held forth on the superiority of the Colonies to the Mother Country. Chances for every one, and a life worth living. Canada was the place to go to, not Australia. A man would be a fool to go to Australia when he could go to Canada. Sapper Dyson, a mighty Australian, of few words but of fierce looks, said a man was a fool to go to Canada when

he could go to Australia. And a New Zealander, Private Hannay, who had lost a leg to which he always alluded affectionately as "dear old Polly," said that a man was a fool to go to Australia or Canada when he could go to such a beautiful and glorious land as New Zealand.

"The pick of the world, the pick of the world," he said. "That's what dear old Polly used to say, and I agreed with her."

"Hoxton's the best place of them all," said a Hoxton man. "Good old Blighty for me. You know where you are here."

"Yes, by God," thundered out Driver Joyce, who was subject to attacks of Socialist rage —"you know where you are and who you are — the under-dog."

"Steady, steady, old chap," said Private Grant. "You'll lose your other eye if you're not careful. Didn't the doctor tell you to keep quiet and peaceful? Here, Nurse, this man wants a drink."

But emigration was in the air all the time. The presence of the Colonials of course fostered it. And the Englishmen made many inquiries about conditions, especially from those who had not been born there, but had themselves emigrated, and were therefore in a better position to compare the disadvantages of the old country with those of the new. Numbers of the young men wanted to leave England. When the Boche had been put in his right place again, and Blighty had settled down to sleep once more, she could surely be left to look after herself. Yes — the new world for them.

There was not much sentiment of patriotism amongst them.

"Patriotism," said Rifleman Jenkins, "is something

for the newspaper chaps to write columns about. I tell you, the words 'For King and Country' make me tired."

Blighty as a land had to be defended at all costs because it contained their houses. That was all. The glory and grandeur of the British Empire did not capture their imaginations. They were only mildly interested when Personages came to see them. Considering that snobbery is deeply implanted in the British breast, it was interesting to notice how little they really cared. Many of them would far rather have welcomed the editor of *John Bull*, or had the gramophone repaired, or been presented with half a dozen new records of the very latest popular music-hall songs.

Great critics were they of the performances they witnessed in their own entertainment room, or at the theatres or music halls to which they were taken. They had learnt to expect the best — and get it. If by chance they didn't get it, they knew — and so did every one else too!

Sapper Harrison was a great imitator of the artists. He took them off to a nicety.

"Like to hear me do a George Robey turn?" he would say. "I'm a genius, I am. Like to hear me take that high note that woman took? Well, you lift yourself up on your toes if you've got any left — like this — and if your jaw's not been blown away, you make a face rather like this — and then, here goes!"

They took off every one that came into their horizon — doctors, nurses, sisters, chaplain, masseuses, librarians, ward visitors — their whole hospital. Their fun and wit were often directed against them, but never their malice. And when they knew that they were go-

ing to be bored, they retired into their sheets, as into a funk-hole, with great promptitude. If not prompt enough, they bore their ordeal with a chivalry which might well have been imitated by rank and fashion.

They were amazingly modest over their own achievements. Weeks went by before any one knew, for instance, that quiet little Corporal Dean had got the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery.

"Don't know what I did for it," he said, blushing violently. "The other fellow with me ought to have had it instead."

Now and again some one would brag a little, or a lot. Private Dawson had tendencies in this direction, but his audience was silent or dwindled away.

Strikers they had no use for.

"Send them all 'over the top,' that'll settle them one way or another," said Private Green grimly. "That'll speed them up quick enough."

They did not speak much of their sufferings which they bore so bravely. They went up to their operations with an unconcern which was both interesting and touching. They called it always, "*Going up to see the pictures.*"

"Sha'n't want my *Boxing News* for a day or two," said Private Wallace, who was a boxer by profession. "Going up to see the pictures for the fifth time."

As for the fighting, they were all agreed that it was not fighting but rank murder. But once out of it, it did not seem to trouble them much. Did they dream of it? No, not much. Now and then they dreamed they were going "over the top." Now and then the cry of a fallen comrade woke them. Now and then a vision of the horrors they had passed through rose before

them. But on the whole, a merciful power of forgetting was vouchsafed to them; and appalling details which might well have haunted them by day and by night, slipped into the background of memory, as if by divine dispensation.

There were some who did not hold forth on any subject whatsoever, neither racing nor emigration, nor socialism, nor even the ways of the War Office. Corporal Brown was one of them. He had never been known to take part in any discussion; but once he did look up from his book when conscientious objectors were being frizzled alive, and said:

"I sometimes think the genuine ones amongst them have had the hardest time of us all, boys. They have stood for an idea and a right one, and for it they have been 'despised and rejected of men'—like that other Reformer we know of."

"Yes, mate, that's all very well," said Private Jackson, who hated the conscientious objectors far worse than the Germans, "but *we've* got to defend their homes and people for them, and lose our limbs for those blighters. That's the way I look at it."

"Yes, it does come to that, I admit," Corporal Brown said. "But somebody must stand up for an idea. I should myself hate to be one of the conscientious objectors, but I have a respect for some of them."

Private Jackson put his two fingers to his head as if to intimate that Corporal Brown's brain was out of order; and Corporal Brown retired to his book.

There were many men, who, like Corporal Brown, did not speak much, but read a good deal. The outside world continues to suppose that wounded soldiers want only the stories of Nat Gould, or *John Bull*, for their

weekly paper. But, although this was true enough of quite a number of men at St. Ursula's, there were always scores of readers who were only too glad to have the chance of getting hold of good books and reading up the subjects in which they were interested. They were given exactly what they wanted. If they wanted a book on wireless telegraphy, they got it. If they wanted a book on motor mechanism or labour problems, or electrical engineering, or metallurgy, or history, they got it. Or if they asked for travel, or adventure, or detective stories, or love romances, they got them. The *Times Literary Supplement* was at their disposal equally with *Tit-Bits*.

Private Seymour, as we know, cared only to read about precious stones. Private Clarke spent all his time studying a book on Sheffield Plate and copying the drawings. Corporal Hunt loved to read about musical composers, and asked for a Life of Chopin the very day he died. Corporal Banks adored roses and was made divinely happy with books on their culture. Private Gifford, a cook's mate, a boy of eighteen, with as bright a face as one could see anywhere, literally devoured good books and only cared for the best. He discussed them, too, with an enthusiasm which was very refreshing, and was always recommending them to his comrades.

"I say, old chap, here's a stunning book," he was always saying. "You'd better read it whilst you can get it."

This enthusiasm amazed Gunner Grant, who boasted that he never read a book through in his life and never meant to. When he went down to the Recreation Room and saw all the books on the shelves, he said:

"Good Lord, do the boys have to read all these — God help them!"

There were others, like Gunner Grant, who had never before waded through a book, but whilst lying ill had acquired the habit of reading "to pass the time away." To many of these lads, books became even as a newly-discovered country, full of possibilities hitherto undreamed of. Private Enfield was one of these explorers. His surprise and joy could only have been equalled by that of the first readers of printed books in the Middle Ages.

As for Sergeant Williams, he had always thought that a life without books was not worth living.

"Yes," he said, "at the Front I wrote to all my friends, and got them to send me books for my battalion. I planned it out that if every man carried one book when we moved on, we could have a library of a thousand volumes at our disposal. I was getting on nicely with my scheme when I got a Blighty wound!"

Stretcher-bearer Gordon had a story to tell about a ruined cottage near Guillemont, where, carefully put away on a rafter, he found one book and a piece of paper with the words:

"*Carefully preserved by a lover of books for another lover of books.*"

Sapper Berridge, a tin-plater in civil life, was exceedingly funny about books. Like many other people about other things, he judged their worth by their money value.

"I'm tired of a sevenpenny book," he said. "I'll try a shilling one today. I expect that'll be better, won't it?"

Or he would say:

"I don't think much of that one shilling story. I'll try one of them six-shilling ones. It ought to be good at that money, oughtn't it?"

Private Nash, who had been buried for two days, and was suffering very exceptionally badly from shell shock and had lost his speech, always wrote down the names of the books he wanted — generally on Egyptology. But his nerves were all to bits, and he trembled a good deal and could not concentrate for long. And he was terribly upset at having lost his mother. The boys were very fond of their mothers. One heard constantly the phrase:

"*My mother has been a good mother to me.*"

Tamar was in Ward Z on the day when Private Nash recovered his speech. It was visiting day, of course, and she had been having long conversations with two or three of the men who were without visitors. They were drawn up to the bedside of one of their comrades, smoking or doing their needlework, at which, under the supervision of the devoted needlework organizer, they had learnt to be so amazingly clever, often only with one hand.

Bomber Thompson, his right arm gone, was about to begin to put in the jewels in the crown of his regimental badge, when he turned to Tamar and said:

"This is in your line, isn't it? Well, it's a good thing you're here today. You can tell me what colours to put in. Can't make up my mind."

Tamar chose emeralds and amethysts. He nodded approval. She was always touched to see them at their work. The thought of the contrast between their

terrible experiences at the Front and this peaceful occupation, always pulled at her heart-strings. She spoke of it now.

"Yes," said Bomber Thompson with a laugh, "a bit of a difference between throwing bombs at the Boches and driving this needle through the canvas with half a hand and all your false teeth."

Suddenly a middle-aged woman, who looked as if she had hardly recovered from some severe illness, came slowly towards the group and stopped.

"Can you tell me where Private Nash is?" she asked.

"In the corner, yonder," Bomber Thompson said, looking up from his badge. "The last bed."

"I'm his mother," she said.

"His mother!" exclaimed the man. "But his mother is dead."

She smiled.

"She nearly died, but not quite," she said.

She went on her way towards the corner, near the lift, and stopped at her son's bedside.

"Ted," she called. "Teddie."

Ted, who was lying huddled beneath the bedclothes, started up, saw who was standing there, and began to tremble violently. Then his voice came to him.

"Mother, it can't be you," he cried. "They've told me you're dead. I can't believe it's you. They've told me you're dead."

"It's me right enough, Teddie," she said, as she put her arms round him. "I gave it to them hot for letting you know I was so ill. As if I was going to die — with my boy out there alone in France in them horrid trenches."

The news spread through the ward. Sister was soon on the spot, followed by all the nurses and many of the men. Private Jones, the huge miner, stumbled up to Ted's bedside, waved his arms about as if he were addressing a multitude, and in his stentorian voice, roared out:

"Now, young feller, you take jolly good care you don't lose that voice of yours again. A voice is a precious thing — and so is a mother."

The news spread through the hospital in that mysterious underground fashion in which tidings, good or ill, burrow their way into publicity. The doctor of the ward learnt it, although she was in the opposite block. The radiographer and her orderly learnt it, and the men playing a game of billiards in the Recreation Room learnt it. It was borne to the kitchen by one of the cleaners, a Mrs. Evans, who had the makings of a true journalist in her.

"Yes," she said, "she took up her bed of death, she did, and walked all the way from Newcastle-on-Tyne to tell him she weren't dead. Only a mother could do that."

The C. O. immersed in work in her office learnt it. Matron interviewing a Sister from Serbia heard it. A Sister lying ill in one of the bunks told one of the librarians. She told a stalwart young girl who was carrying with gay ease a mountain of bedding across the courtyard. She told Sergeant-Major and he told the transport officer. A newspaper man who chanced to be there, snabbled it for his paper. His account corresponded very nearly with that of the cleaner, only he put the place farther north, choosing the remoter spot of Aberdeen, instead of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Marion Thornton went down with Tamar when she left the ward that afternoon. She had to go to the Quarter-Master's office to exchange an old electric lamp for a new one; but in any case she always contrived to have an errand to do on the occasion of Tamar's departures, partly because she liked to have a few minutes' talk with this friend to whom she had become much attached, but also from protective reasons, to make sure that she got off safely without any untoward adventure or any sudden panic or sadness at the sight of suffering.

She need not have feared. Tamar might say that she still disliked being with sick people, but she at least never shrank from harrowing scenes as at the beginning. Wondering admiration and a great compassion had taken the place of personal sensitiveness. Gratitude to these undaunted sufferers had ousted her former selfish reluctance to serve. She was increasingly happy and secretly proud in being associated with this hospital. When she crossed the courtyard, she no longer turned her eyes away, if she saw an operation case being taken back from the theatre to the ward. The sight of a disfigured face no longer made her shrink. The broken men in blue, hobbling along on their crutches, did not now inspire her with a sudden longing to dash away and forget that there was such a thing as a war going on. She was not scared when she met any of the officials — not even any of the clever-looking doctors. She had learnt to be immensely proud of them, proud of what they were accomplishing, and of what they stood for. And today when she glanced up at the window of the C. O.'s office and saw her and the Surgeon-in-Chief bending over their desks, Tamar paused and asked herself a question. It was this:

"Could I perhaps spare one of my best Siam sapphires, and help with the training of another medical woman exactly after the pattern of those women in there?"

But she edited herself immediately.

"No, no," she said, firmly. "I must not be too generous. I'm doing quite enough as it is. Quite enough."

Marion's voice roused her from her reflections.

"Good-bye," she said. "I shall look for you next Saturday. I say, whilst I remember it, don't you dare forget you've promised to take a party of men to the theatre. Twelve would be a nice number, wouldn't it?"

Tamar laughed her soft laugh. She loved these claims which Marion made on her. She watched the girl dart across the grey courtyard. She gave a last glance at the rows upon rows of windows which had at first so appalled her, and now seemed to beckon to her with friendly greeting. She glanced at the four or five little stunted trees trying their bravest and best not to be outdone by the flowers in the pots and boxes sentinelled here and there. She was on the point of following the stream of departing mothers, sisters, sweethearts and all the other visitors, when suddenly the convoy bell sounded.

Not for all the C. O.s in the world, not for all the Regulations of the Defence of the Realm would Tamar have missed the chance of being present at the arrival of a convoy.

She beat a bold and hasty retreat to the area of the West Block, and from a safe corner saw again the interesting spectacle of those dashing girl orderlies scurrying on to the scene from all parts of the hospital, lining

up in front of the Sergeant-Major and ready for instant service, whilst the grey Red Cross Ambulances glided in, one by one, with their freight of wounded from the Front.

PART III

CHAPTER I

IT was on the twenty-fourth of February, 1916, that the news came through of the German attack launched on Verdun and of the magnificent French resistance, the heroic continuation of which was to be the abiding admiration of the whole world. Tamar had bought a paper and glanced at the news; for though she hated newspapers at any time and had no wish to follow the course of the war in detail, yet she had got as far as keeping vaguely in touch with leading events. For one thing, Bramfield became so cross if she did not know what was happening; and he was fretting so much over Bruce that she did not like to vex him, if she could help it. Also, it was rather annoying when people said: "Didn't you hear that?" or "Didn't you read that in this morning's paper?"

Not that her soldier friends at St. Ursula's would have reproached her. By no means. They would probably have said:

"If you don't want to know the real news from the Front, read the newspapers carefully."

She could hear the huge Yorkshire miner, Private Jones, giving forth this sentiment in stentorian accents. She laughed as she tucked the paper under her arm and passed on her way home, after having attended a sale at Christie's.

As she rounded the corner, she came upon a pretty young woman selling flags, who was at the moment engaged in pinning one on the coat of an elderly gentle-

man. He did not look as if rationing would be a bad thing for him.

"I seem to know that young woman's face," thought Tamar. "Where have I seen her, I wonder?

"Ha," she said aloud, after she had advanced a few yards. "I remember — the minx who robbed me and who was forgiven by me when I was in a melting mood."

She turned back, impelled by an irresistible desire to torture her victim again. The old gentleman had departed; and the flag-seller stood alone rearranging the flags in her basket.

"I should like a Serbian flag," Tamar said. "A penny one."

The young woman looked up and recognized Tamar. She gave a low cry of alarm and seemed almost on the point of throwing down her basket and running away for dear life, when Tamar said:

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm not going to harm you. If I didn't harm you then, it is not at all likely that I should harm you now. Please pin a penny flag on my coat."

With trembling hands the poor minx pinned the flag on Tamar's coat, Tamar smiling the while, with that particular kind of smile which we associate with the Spanish Inquisition tortures. If the girl had been told to pin on a hundred flags, she would have done so gladly to get rid of this most unwelcome customer.

"By the way," said Tamar, "thank you for the little box you sent me out of gratitude. Well, good-bye. I'm glad you are doing something useful. I suppose it is useful."

She passed on, having enjoyed herself hugely. And

soon after she had another little bit of enjoyment, but of another kind and with no cruelty in it this time. A young girl, walking along sedately with an old lady and an old gentleman, suddenly broke away from them and bounded forward to meet Tamar.

"Madame, Madame!" she cried, "how happy I am to see you again! Don't you remember Marie Louise?"

Yes, indeed, she remembered Marie Louise, though it was not easy at first to recognize in this happy young creature with laughing eyes and rounded cheeks, that poor, frightened, demented, forlorn little refugee found in the hold of the barge, unknown and unclaimed. But if she had changed in appearance, Marie Louise had not changed in affection. And she still clung to Tamar as she had clung at the station when she had refused to be separated from the English friend who had been so good to her.

"You see, she does not forget you, Madame," Grand'mère said. "Everything else of that dreadful time has passed from her mind, but not yourself."

Hand in hand they walked along together, those two, Marie Louise chatting happily, and Tamar recalling how the trust of that helpless, stricken child had first roused in her a feeling of protective kindness to which she had hitherto been a stranger. No, she would never forget Marie Louise. Marie Louise had broken down a barrier for her which perhaps, no one else could ever have removed.

When she arrived home, she found Bramfield waiting for her. The old char, made bold now by the churn up, had brewed him a cup of tea. She thought he seemed tired and out of sorts.

"I thought you wouldn't grudge it to him," she said. "Not in these 'ere changed times."

Tamar smiled indulgently. She never resented the old char's criticisms of or allusions to her natural meanness. From no one else would she have suffered them. But Mrs. Bridges and she were knit together by many years of mutual forbearance.

Bramfield told her that he was so exceedingly restless that he did not know how to live his days, busy though he was.

"I plan and plan for Bruce," he said. "I contrive something all day long and dream about it all night, Tamar. I shall never rest until I make a dash into Germany and see what I can do for the boy. I've kept back because I promised you to wait for the report of the American Doctors. Ten whole weeks — no more. I went through miseries of suspense when delay after delay occurred, and still the Germans were pretending to arrange for the Mission to start. And miseries when it did at last get off. And as you know, my Tamar, miseries of disappointment when they did not go to Döberitz. What I should have done without your kindness and help and sympathy, I can't think. Very good have you been to me, my Tamar, very patient. I've given a lot of trouble lately."

She shook her head.

"No, no," she said; "no, that's not true."

"And now, worse rumours of the sufferings of the prisoners are coming through," he said.

"Yes, I know," she said gently.

"It is simply not to be borne," he said, "and I've come to tell you quite frankly that I cannot keep my promise any longer. I don't care a brass farthing if

people think I am a futile fool for wanting to get into Germany. Other people have done it, and come out safe and sound. Well, we saw some ourselves, you remember? There was a man in our office the other day, who had actually been to Berlin and got back again all right. And he knows about as much German as your old char. But he had cheek and could bluff well and kept his head. Well, I have cheek and I can bluff well, and moreover, I can speak German fluently."

"That may be," said Tamar, "but you won't be able to keep cool, Bramfield. You get so excited. You're so impetuous — like a boy."

He laughed.

"Yes, it is rather ridiculous at my age," he said. "But at least it makes one continue to attempt impossibilities. And that keeps one from becoming a fossil."

"And what do you propose to do when you are in Germany?" Tamar asked.

"I can't tell till I get there," he answered. "But one thing will lead to another, and I shall rescue Bruce. I tell you again, every fresh account that reaches us of what the prisoners are suffering, makes me more determined than ever to have a try at carrying out his escape. It is awful to sit here and do nothing. But I can't go without your consent, my Tamar. I've been tempted many times these last weeks, but have always ended up by saying to myself that it wouldn't be playing the game. I want your consent. If I have it, it will speed me on my way with hope and good cheer."

She rose and paced up and down the room, with her hands clasped behind her. Her face was tense. She was stirred to her depths. If he went without her consent, he would go disheartened and saddened at the

outset, and that might spell failure for him. If he went with her consent and met with disaster and destruction, then she would have helped to send him to his doom.

She turned to him suddenly, with her arms stretched out and almost in entreaty.

"Bramfield," she cried, "it is simply madness — can't you see it is just madness?"

"No, I don't see it as madness," he answered stubbornly. "A so-called mad thing often proves the only sane thing to have done in the circumstances. It all turns on whether one fails or succeeds. Chance. A hair's breadth. That's what it is."

Up and down she paced again, whilst he sat staring on the ground, his hands gripping his knees. At last she knelt down by his side.

"You shall go with my consent, dear Bramfield," she said, in a low voice which scarcely seemed able to give utterance to her words. "I mustn't keep you. I won't urge you to stay. If it is madness — well, it has to be madness. But you go with my consent, and therefore with my blessing."

"Ah, my Tamar," he said, "then that means that I shall succeed."

"Yes," she said, "you will succeed. You are mad enough to succeed in anything."

"Mad enough to have succeeded in taming you," he said, as he drew her nearer to him. "If I could do that, I could do anything on earth."

Then, after a spell of silence, he said:

"But if I were to fail, and not return, you'd look after Bruce when he came home, wouldn't you? You'd

make a point of doing it, wouldn't you? Everybody has got to have some one to belong to, and Bruce would have no one except you — until he got married."

For answer she nodded her head, and his hand rested on it, as if in benediction.

Later, he said:

"By the way, Tamar, I rather want to see your star ruby. I've been buying one for a client lately — for one of those ladies with earrings that you're so fond of — and I would like to compare it with yours. I have it here. It is a beauty, but not as fine as yours, if I remember rightly."

He drew out his pocket-book and took from it a lovely asteria, with its six-pointed shimmering star, diverging from the centre of the stone to the edges.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It is very beautiful," she said, as she turned it over and examined it critically.

"Now let me see yours," he said. "I am curious to compare the two. Of course you will say yours is the best. I wonder you haven't said it already."

To his surprise, Tamar made no effort to open her safe and produce her own specimen.

"Don't you want to be bothered?" he asked. "Well, let me get it out. It's on the top shelf, isn't it? I won't bag anything."

"It is not there," she said, turning her face away.

"It isn't there," he repeated in amazement. "Then where is it?"

"It is gone," she said sulkily.

"Gone!" he exclaimed. "Why, you don't mean to say you have parted with it? It was one of your special

joys, surely. Why didn't you tell me? You have always told me before when you parted with anything like that."

She was silent for a minute or two and then, as if she were making a shameful confession, said:

"I don't think I want to talk about it, Bramfield. It was a great wrench to give it up. It went to the Red Cross — with other things."

And little by little he wormed out of her, that amongst other stones, she had sent a rose-pink beryl she valued greatly, an alexandrite cat's-eye, which was extremely rare, and a specially beautiful Oriental topaz.

Simply, almost surlily, she told him that she had realized she had to make sacrifices. It was not enough to write cheques. She had thought it was, at first. She had written a cheque now and again, chiefly for the sake of easing her conscience. But after she had been to Holland and seen Gertrude Linton's disinterestedness, yes, and his own disinterestedness, the disinterestedness of all the people he had brought her in contact with over there, she had begun to look at things differently. *She* had wanted to give a bit of service. And after she had been to the hospital and seen for herself the sacrifices the men had made, *she* wanted to make sacrifices.

"I don't pretend I've made them gladly, Bramfield," she said, with a wistful smile. "I could never arrive at that point. Never in my life. But I've started on the journey. You have helped me. When I dream of my mother now, I no longer see her angry, menacing. And sometimes in the stillness of the night, those words you spoke, are borne to me afresh. Perhaps you could speak them now."

He was moved by her confession, touched by her sim-

ple frankness. He looked at her with a radiance on his face, which she never forgot, and then spoke the beautiful words for which she asked:

"Lay not up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourself treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

CHAPTER II

A WEEK or two afterwards, Bramfield went to Holland. He did not say good-bye to Tamar, but slipped off without a word; and it was from his friend, the lapidary, that she learnt he had really gone. She had called in on some business and heard from Mr. Grierson that Bramfield had asked him to tell her.

"I was coming to you today," he said. "I tried hard to dissuade him from attempting to get into Germany. It seemed to me an altogether mad scheme. I can only hope that his friends at The Hague and Rotterdam will prevent him. But he is obsessed with the idea. And you know that when an idea gets into Bramfield's brain, nothing moves him."

"He had to go," Tamar said, as she played listlessly with some bits of jade on the counter. But her heart sank.

On her way home she kept on saying to herself:

"He had to go. He had to go."

In the days that followed, she was restless and absent-minded. Her thoughts were with Bramfield all the time. Always was she wondering what he was doing: whether his friends in Holland had persuaded him to relinquish his plan, or whether he had passed over the frontier and was having adventures and misadventures, the very thought of which made her heart stand still. At moments she tortured herself with regrets and self-reproaches that she had not detained him. She knew that she, if any one, could have detained him, could have

deterred him. If she had said to Bramfield that she would marry him then and there, he would not have gone. Why did she not say it? She had almost said it. She had not refrained because of dreading to give up her liberty. She was caring less and less for her liberty. No, she had refrained because she knew that it was Bramfield's soul's necessity to go, and to cajole him at such a moment and take an unfair advantage of his affection for her, would have been a mean and unworthy trick. He would have hated her for it in the end — and she would have hated herself — and him. But when he was safely back again, then she would say to him:

"Bramfield, I don't want my liberty any more — I don't want it any more."

Almost she could hear him saying:

"All right, my Tamar. Are you sure you've made up your mind at last?"

She wrote immediately one of her laconic letters to him and sent it to the American Relief Commission, where she knew his correspondence always went. This was the letter:

"Dear Bramfield,

"I want to say that when you return I don't want my liberty any more.

"T. Scott."

Mercifully for her she was very busy. A new War Loan had been started, and her shop had been invaded by people bringing their jewels and antiques to sell. And she had been called away to value a collection in Cambridgeshire; and in addition to her own business claims, she had her work cut out for her at the hospital,

where she had now been installed as ward visitor to Ward Z, the C.O. having recognized her kindness and steadiness of service and purpose. For whatever her faults, fickleness was not one of them. Proud was Tamar when the C.O. asked her to be ward visitor to Z. She did not, of course, betray any signs of pleasure. On the contrary, she appeared to the C.O. and the Chief Surgeon, who both interviewed her, to be an exceedingly sulky individual until she smiled. Then they knew. But they could not imagine what on earth she meant when, on taking her leave, she mumbled something about having very likely to reconsider her decision about a Siam sapphire. It was indeed a cryptic statement.

Parties of wounded men came to tea in Dean Street, brought by Marion in charge. The old char gasped at the spreads, and at their disappearance!

"Not a crumb left," she said. "These soldiers can eat as well as fight, can't they? And what's going to become of us soon, I should like to know? We shall have to put up the shutters and go to the Workhouse, what with soldiers' teas and a gramophone and prisoners' parcels. Times is changing too much. I'm getting scared. Aren't you spending too much of our money?"

Tamar chuckled. She liked her spreads. She loved the wholesale demands that Marion made on her, though she by no means always responded to them; and so far she had entirely refused to be roped into Winifred's net spread for the welfare and care of the munition girl workers, who were now toiling in their thousands in all parts of the country. But whenever she did let herself go, she never failed to maintain the profoundest secrecy about what she almost appeared to consider a fresh

crime. It was a curious attitude, but it was distinctly better than a blast of trumpets, a flashing of the limelight, a dashing after recognitions and honours, an accentuation of self-importance, an insistence on the value of what one was doing and being for one's country — cheap satisfaction and perishable. Probably Tamar was too much taken up with the effort of being human, and doing battle with her temperamental tendencies to have any strength or consciousness left for the development of "trimmings." Perhaps, too, she was helped and influenced in her new career of human being, by the example of the single-minded soldiers she saw week in week out at the hospital, who put no value on their individual bit, except as forming an infinitesimal part of a great whole.

She was not destined to pass through these anxious days of waiting for news of Bramfield, without being buoyed up by one or two unexpected happenings of good cheer. To her glad surprise, Dorothy arrived one morning, arm in arm with Rupert. They were radiantly happy. It was evident that Rupert was not concerned with problems of the unseen world.

"We have just been married," Dorothy announced gaily. "I got ten days' leave and thought we might just as well do the trick, so that Rupert might not go on being gummidgy — dear old thing. He doesn't look gummidgy now, does he?"

"Great, isn't it?" Rupert said, beaming. "We had to come and tell you, you know, so that we might have some of that celebrated Tokay and see your present for the one and only home which still looms in the dim distance — the very dim distance, worse luck. Never

mind. I've landed her. She's mine. I had to waive that little matter about the Ordre de Leopold II!"

"It rather takes my breath away," Tamar said, laughing at them. "But I suppose it is only part of the churn up."

"That's it," Rupert said. "And that is how mother took it. Mother's a peerless pearl."

"Yes, indeed she is," Dorothy said. "She looked up calmly from her knitting and said: 'Really, how delightful, my dear children!' And we all hugged each other. Worth any amount of wedding festivities and fussations — that."

"Rather," agreed Rupert. "And it was a treat to see how she snuffed out Uncle James Currie when he muttered something about it being 'precipitate, unusual, undignified.' 'James,' she said, 'try and not show any more than you can help, how ridiculously out-of-date you are.'"

"It was priceless," said Dorothy. "I only hope my mother will play up when she knows. By the way, Rupe, we must send her a wire at the station."

"We're off to Lallington for our honeymoon," Rupert said. "I was delighted when Dorothy chose it."

"I love the old Grange," Dorothy said, "and the monk who comes and looks in at the library window, and Barguest, the soft-footed hound, and all the other queer things belonging to the place — and Rupert, the queerest and dearest of them all."

They drank Tokay, and interviewed Tamar's present, the beautiful Limoges enamel which was to wait there for them until the day dawned for the one and only home.

Laughing in their young happiness and comradeship, they came. Laughing they went. When they had gone, the world seemed dark to Tamar. But the clouds drifted after a time; and the memory of their joy shone out like a beacon.

That helped her for many days.

Then Tom turned up. He had been nearly three months at the Front, had been doing very well, and had already earned praise for courage and resourcefulness. But "Archie" had caught him on the left arm, not very badly, but badly enough to send him home to Blighty for a short time; and he was in hilarious spirits and as keen as mustard, and almost as boyish as ever, though he looked older.

"Who knows," he said, "if it had not been for your amulet and the mysterious words you pronounced over it and me, my valuable life, the hope of the country, might have come to its regretted end. Instead of which, here I am, cheerioh, going to all the theatres for the benefit of my impaired health. By the way, any more treasure been found at the Grange? Do you know, when I was coming to, after my operation, they said I kept on calling out, 'Encyclopaedia!' Touching, wasn't it? Shows how one's heart seeks the haven of one's home. But then I always was romantic from earliest birth, though no one has ever believed it. I tell you, the Sister was much impressed. She said: 'I see we have a scholar here.' I told her I was a scholar and very particular about the kind of encyclopaedia I used — you know the kind I mean, don't you? Well — were there any more precious stones tucked away snugly anywhere? Not even such a trifling thing as a diamond?"

Tamar laughed, and said that not even such a trifling thing as a diamond had been found.

He was hugely delighted at Rupert's marriage, but wished he could have come over from France in his "old bus" to drop rice or confetti on their heads.

He told her thrilling stories about the airmen at the Front and the wonderful things they did. His face lit up as he spoke of their superb daring.

"When I used to read about them at home," he said, "I used to think of them as sort of gods into whose presence I should never come. And I still think of them as gods — more than ever, now that I know more about them."

Tamar was again bewildered with all the details he poured out for her instruction. Long reconnaissances, short distance reconnaissances, severe strafes by Archie, machine-guns, zig-zag-dive-zooms, patrolling, low flying, night and day bombing, photography, gun mountings, controls, enemy machines, artillery observation, were some of the subjects hurled recklessly at her brain. But though bewildered, she was exceedingly "bucked." His good spirits, his enthusiasm and his cheery companionship were a godsend to her in her anxiety; and if ever a person was grateful for the magic healing power of the greatest of all magics — youth, with its irresistible hope and buoyancy — Tamar was that person.

She had told him about Bramfield; and in his own way he tried to encourage her. He said he was sure that Bramfield would came back safely, and she was not to fret and use the cambric handkerchief. No, she really must not.

When she smiled at the allusion to this old friend, he said:

"There, now, you can still smile. That's right."

Never a day went by but that Tom dashed into the shop, if only for a few minutes, and called out:

"Hullo, you there? Any news from that blighter yet?"

And once he dragged her out to the Coliseum. He would take no refusal.

"Come on," he said. "It'll do you good. Help you to forget your trouble. Marion's coming, too. Just go and get your hat, and we'll be off. I'll put the shutters up and give the cat some milk."

When he came to say good-bye to her, his last words were:

"Now mind you keep your tail-end up. And, I say, if you feel like it, I wish you'd send me some Magliesberg tobacco sometimes. And don't forget to wish me luck in bringing down Boche machines. Weave them into the spell, can't you? And be sure and scratch me a line when your news comes through. Cheerioh!"

CHAPTER III

THE news came through at last, after ten long weeks of waiting. Gertrude Linton brought it. She arrived with her little suit-case in her hand, and sat down at the counter. She looked pale. There was none of her usual gaiety of manner.

"I bring bad news, dear friend," she said.

Tamar bent over the counter and stared in front of her.

"Bramfield is dead," Gertrude Linton said. "He was shot as a spy three weeks ago. We learnt this only two days ago. We learnt also that Bruce had escaped, and is safe."

Tamar still bent over the counter, but her eyes were closed and her lips were quivering. Otherwise she gave no sign that she had heard.

"Tamar," said Gertrude Linton, and touched her on the arm. "Tamar, I want you to know that he received your letter — Tamar."

There was no sign, no response — only a terrible silence, long-drawn-out in an eternity of pain.

"Dear friend," Gertrude Linton said at last. "Amongst others, I've brought over, this time, a forlorn old governess, who has lived in Frankfurt for years and has no home to go to. You'll take her in for a night or two until we can arrange for her, won't you? You'll carry on — won't you?"

"Yes," said Tamar, in a voice which seemed to come from a far distance. "I'll carry on."

She raised herself from the counter, and went slowly upstairs to prepare the room.

THE END

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